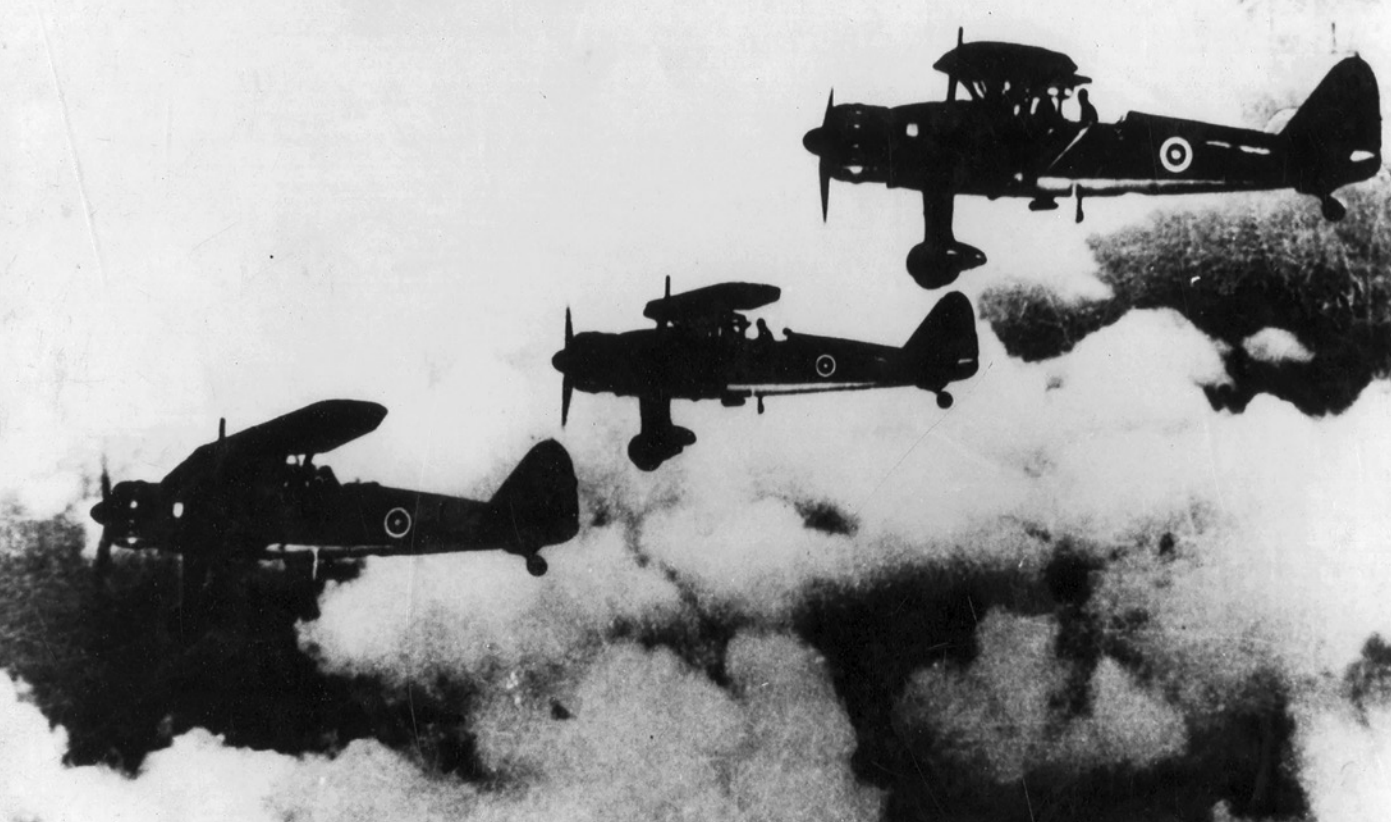
AIR CAMPAIGN

YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE 1940–41

The Axis' aerial assault in the Balkans

BASILIO DI MARTINO & PIER PAOLO BATTISTELLI
ILLUSTRATED BY GRAHAM TURNER



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INTRODUCTION

A Blenheim Mk IV of 32 Mira at the Trikkala airfield in October 1940. The 12 Blenheim Mk IVs of the Greek Air Force were used exclusively in a ground support role, in contrast with the RAF Blenheim in Greece. (Athens War Museum)

The main characteristic of the 1940–41 Balkans air campaign is fragmentation. The conflict can be seen as the sequence of two, if not three, basically independent air campaigns. The first one involved the *Regia Aeronautica* (RA, Royal Italian Air Force) and the *Elliniki Vasiliki Aeroporia* (EVA, Royal Hellenic Air Force), joined in November by the *Royal Air Force* (RAF). This part of the campaign lasted from October 1940 to April 1941 and could easily be considered as a war of attrition. The second phase had two more players, the Luftwaffe and the *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo* (JKRV, Royal Yugoslav Air Force), and with the conflict spreading to the entire Balkans, it can be looked on as an example of a so-called '*blitzkrieg*' strategy.

The campaign can be split into two overlapping conflicts: one against Yugoslavia and one against Greece. In spite of existing opportunities at strategic level, such as the bombing of the Romanian oilfields, the campaign as a whole was mainly conducted at operational and tactical levels. The RA had no clear aim at the start, and plans subsequently drafted for strategic attacks against Greece's main harbours were hampered by bad weather and the need to support the army. The EVA lacked the capability to conduct any sort of offensive operations above the tactical level and even at this level the available resources were quite limited and unsuited to any significant effort. In line with its pre-war doctrine, the RAF did not attempt to co-operate with the Greek Army, carrying out instead a sort of strategic air campaign against Albania, also frustrated by bad weather.

When the Luftwaffe entered the fray, it acted at tactical and operational level with the same effectiveness it had shown in Poland and France. Nevertheless, even though the city of Belgrade was hit hard to accelerate the disintegration of Yugoslavia and major strikes were conducted against Piraeus harbour, very little was done at the strategic level. Even the late-

Regia Aeronautica

1. **Taranto – Manduria (Oria)**
   - 92ª Squadriglia/8° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 93ª Squadriglia/8° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 94ª Squadriglia/8° Gruppo autonomo CT
2. **Brindisi**
   - 372ª Squadriglia/153° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 190ª Squadriglia BM/86° Gruppo/35° Stormo BT-BM
   - 191ª Squadriglia BM/ 86° Gruppo/35° Stormo BT-BM
   - 230ª Squadriglia BT/95° Gruppo/ 35° Stormo BT-BM
   - 231ª Squadriglia BT/95° Gruppo/ 35° Stormo BT-BM
   - 210ª Squadriglia BT/50° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 211ª Squadriglia BT/50° Gruppo autonomo BT
3. **Bari**
   - 373ª Squadriglia/153° Gruppo autonomo CT
4. **Gioia del Colle**
   - 1ª Squadriglia BT/11° Gruppo/13° Stormo BT
   - 4ª Squadriglia BT/11° Gruppo/13° Stormo BT
   - 3ª Squadriglia BT/43° Gruppo/13° Stormo BT
   - 5ª Squadriglia BT/43° Gruppo/13° Stormo BT
5. **Bari – Palese**
   - 254ª Squadriglia BT/105° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 255ª Squadriglia BT/105° Gruppo autonomo BT
6. **Grottaglie**
   - 374ª Squadriglia/153° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 356ª Squadriglia autonoma CT
   - 260ª Squadriglia BT/106° Gruppo/ 47° Stormo BT
   - 261ª Squadriglia BT/106° Gruppo/ 47° Stormo BT
   - 262ª Squadriglia BT/107° Gruppo/ 47° Stormo BT
   - 263ª Squadriglia BT/107° Gruppo/ 47° Stormo BT
7. **Lecce**
   - 220ª Squadriglia BT/55° Gruppo/37° Stormo BT
   - 221ª Squadriglia BT/55° Gruppo/37° Stormo BT
   - 276ª Squadriglia BT/116° Gruppo/ 37° Stormo BT
   - 277ª Squadriglia BT/116° Gruppo/ 37° Stormo BT
   - 209ª Squadriglia BaT/97° Gruppo autonomo BaT
   - 239ª Squadriglia BaT/97° Gruppo autonomo BaT
8. **Foggia**
   - 51ª Squadriglia BT/39° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 69ª Squadriglia BT/39° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 202ª Squadriglia BT/40° Gruppo/40° Stormo BT
   - 203ª Squadriglia BT/40° Gruppo/40° Stormo BT
   - 252ª Squadriglia BT/104° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 253ª Squadriglia BT/104° Gruppo autonomo BT
9. **Gorizia**
   - 97ª Squadriglia/9° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
   - 34ª Squadriglia/61° Gruppo autonomo OA
   - 128ª Squadriglia/71° Gruppo autonomo OA
10. **Alture di Pola**
    - 73ª Squadriglia/9° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
    - 96ª Squadriglia/9° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
    - 36ª Squadriglia/61° Gruppo autonomo OA
11. **Ronchi dei Legionari**
    - 84ª Squadriglia/10° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
    - 90ª Squadriglia/10° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
    - 91ª Squadriglia/10° Gruppo/4° Stormo CT
12. **Treviso**
    - 76ª Squadriglia/7° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
    - 86ª Squadriglia/7° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
    - 98ª Squadriglia/7° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
13. **Ravenna**
    - 167ª Squadriglia/16° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
    - 168ª Squadriglia/16° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
14. **Aviano**
    - 65ª Squadriglia BT/31° Gruppo/18° Stormo BT
    - 66ª Squadriglia BT/31° Gruppo/18° Stormo BT
    - 47ª Squadriglia BT/37° Gruppo/18° Stormo BT
    - 48ª Squadriglia BT/37° Gruppo/18° Stormo BT
15. **Udine**
    - 169ª Squadriglia/16° Gruppo/54° Stormo CT
    - 41ª Squadriglia/63° Gruppo autonomo OA
    - 113ª Squadriglia/63° Gruppo autonomo OA
    - 38ª Squadriglia/71° Gruppo autonomo OA
    - 116ª Squadriglia/71° Gruppo autonomo OA
16. **Forli**
    - 8ª Squadriglia BT/25° Gruppo autonomo BT
    - 9ª Squadriglia BT/25° Gruppo autonomo BT
17. **Vicenza**
    - 242ª Squadriglia BT/99° Gruppo autonomo BT
    - 243ª Squadriglia BT/99° Gruppo autonomo BT

April anti-shipping campaign by the VIII. Fliegerkorps was not able to prevent the evacuation of the Allied forces from Greece, thus failing to achieve a strategic aim.

Tactical air support predominated in both the 1940–41 and the 1941 phases of the Balkans air campaign, along with efforts to achieve air superiority, which raises the question of how effectively the air forces involved were in attaining their goals. The Regia Aeronautica was unable to support the *Regio Esercito* (Royal Italian Army) effectively, its medium bombers being ill-suited to close air support and near battlefield interdiction operations, while air-to-ground co-operation was part neither of its training syllabus nor of its doctrine. Dive-bombers were more effective, but the RA had just a few Ju 87 Stukas, nicknamed '*Picchiatelli*'[1]. Close air support was left to the two-seater Ro.37bis biplanes, part of the *osservazione aerea* (air observation) under army control. Medium bombers, dive-bombers and air observation biplanes were quite free to operate since the fighter squadrons deployed on the Albanian airfields were able to provide a secure fly zone thanks to their numerical superiority. The EVA fought courageously but RAF support, which focused on Albania, neglected ground troops and did not shift the balance – unlike the Luftwaffe which did, in a matter of weeks, albeit at a cost.

Facing three enemies at the same time and a multitude of tasks, the Luftwaffe proved capable of gaining and maintaining air superiority while supporting its army, in accordance with its military doctrine, but failed in the strategic aim of preventing the Allied evacuation from Greece. As such, both the 1940–41 and the 1941 Balkans air campaigns can be considered campaigns of missed opportunities.

1 The name '*Picchiatello*', literally 'crackpot', is a joke, since the word sounds close to *picchiata*, which is Italian for 'dive'.

CHRONOLOGY

1940

28 October Italian attack against Greece.

4 November First order by Hitler to prepare for a German intervention against Greece.

13 November The Italian attack is halted.

15 November Start of the Greek counter-attack.

14–23 November Arrival of RAF units in Greece.

22 November The Greek offensive pushes into Albania.

23 November Romania joins the Tripartite Pact.

5–13 December Plans for a German attack against Greece, Operation *Marita*, are prepared.

9 December Start of the British offensive in North Africa.

20 December Hitler issues his directive for Operation *Marita.*

1941

13–17 January First mission to Athens of the British C-in-C Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, and of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore (Air Commander, Middle East).

29 January Death of the Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas.

6 February British capture of Benghazi, in Libya.

8 February The new Greek Prime Minister Alexandros Koryzis officially asks for British help.

19 February Start of the British offensive against Italian East Africa.

22 February British decision to send troops to Greece.

14 February to 12 March Arrival of German troops in Libya.

1 March Arrival of German troops in Bulgaria.

2 March General Sir Maitland Wilson, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, arrives in Athens.

7 March Arrival in Greece of the first units of the British Expeditionary Force (Operation *Lustre*).

9–26 March Failed Italian offensive in Albania.

26–27 March Yugoslav *coup d'état.*

27 March Hitler's decision to invade Yugoslavia, the directive for Operation *25* is issued.

31 March German and Italian advance into Tripolitania.

6 April German attack against Yugoslavia and Greece. Bombing of Belgrade.

9 April German seizure of Salonika.

12 April German troops enter Belgrade.

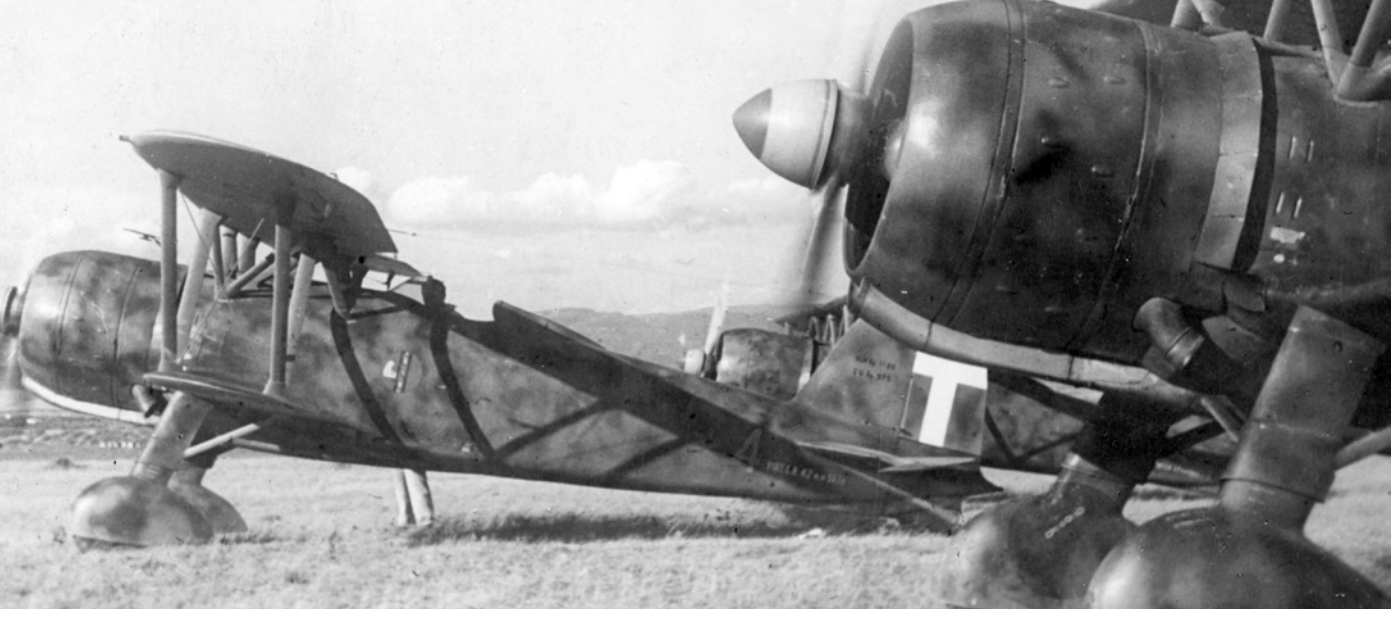
17 April Yugoslav surrender.

20 April Greek Epirus Army surrender.

22 April Start of the British evacuation from Greece, Operation *Demon.*

26 April German airborne assault to the Corinth Canal bridge.

30 April The end of the evacuation marks the end of the campaign.



ATTACKER'S CAPABILITIES

The Axis

A section of FIAT CR.42 biplane fighters warming up their engines before take-off. The CR.42 was, at the time, the backbone of the RA fighter component but in October 1940, before reinforcements arrived, only nine CR.42s were in Albania, all with the 395ª Squadriglia. (AC)

Regia Aeronautica

When Italy declared war on France and Great Britain on 10 June 1940, the Regia Aeronautica could field 783 multi-engine bombers, making it the third-largest air force in the world. In addition, most of the Italian fleet was similar in performance to the aircraft of other fighting countries. However, during that summer it was unable to achieve any decisive result. Following the fall of France, Italy was in a position to take the initiative in the Mediterranean, but it lacked doctrine and planning. In the late 1930s, the dilemma about the nature of the war to come, either a Continental or a Mediterranean conflict, was left unresolved. The deployment of fighting units was the result of this persistent dilemma and was intended to face up to all possible options. Albania, seized in April 1939, was not the foremost front and for that reason Generale di Squadra Aerea Ferruccio Ranza's *Comando Aeronautica Albania* (Albania Air Command) in October 1940 had only one bomber wing, one fighter squadron, one transport flight and one independent flight section for liaison duties:

1. 38° Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre (BT), with 31 three-engine S.81s, divided between 39° Gruppo (51ª and 69ª Squadriglia), at Tirana, and 40° Gruppo (202ª and 203ª Squadriglia), at Lecce, in Puglia, the 'heel' of mainland Italy;
2. 160° Gruppo Autonomo (Independent) Caccia Terrestre (CT), with 15 CR.32s at Tirana (393ª and 394ª Squadriglia) and 9 CR.42s at Berat (395ª Squadriglia), together with two Caproni Ca.133s and one Ca.111 for transport and liaison duties;
3. 611ª Squadriglia Trasporto (T), with five twin-engine biplanes Breda Ba.44s, at Tirana;
4. Sezione Autonoma di Volo (Independent Flight Section) with two three-engine S.79s, two S.81s, one twin-engine Caproni Ca.308.

Under the administrative and technical control of the Comando Aeronautica Albania was also an air observation squadron, the 72° Gruppo Osservazione Aerea (OA), equipped with two-seater Ro.37bis biplanes, with the 25ª Squadriglia at Koritza (Coriza or Korça) and the 120ª at Argirocastro (Gjirokastër), under the operational control of the army.

In summer 1940 operations had been limited to a few uneventful air patrols flown by the fighters; to several reconnaissance sorties over sea by the bombers; and to the ineffective attack of 9 S.81s of 40° Gruppo against the Mediterranean Fleet off the coast of Calabria on 9 July, during the so-called Battle of Punta Stilo. The logistics infrastructure was still under development and the only fully equipped airfield was Tirana, with Berat and Durazzo coming not even close, while all remaining airfields were still little more than bare landing strips.

The most relevant component of Ranza's small air fleet was the 38° Stormo whose operational capability was adversely affected both by logistical shortcomings and the way it was formed after Italy occupied Albania in April 1939. This bomber wing was in fact established at Tirana on 1 May 1939 with personnel and material from the 32° Stormo. In June 1940, the training level was considered satisfactory for basic operations, notwithstanding the continuous turnover of pilots and technicians, with the more expert of them regularly replaced by rookies coming from the air force schools.

As far as the aircraft were concerned, most S.81s had already logged too many flight hours and were due for general inspection at industrial level. This three-engine fixed-undercarriage bomber was a sturdy aircraft with an impressive bombload of up to 2,000kg, a defensive armament of six 7.7 machine guns and a combat range of 430km. In 1935, it had been a big step forward for the Regia Aeronautica and it had seen a lot of action in Spain, but by 1940 it was quickly becoming obsolete with its maximum speed of 340km/h. In other *stormi,* the SIAI S.81 '*Pipistrello*' (*Bat*) was being replaced by the three-engine CANT Z.1007bis '*Alcione*' (*Kingfisher*), that in spite of its wooden structure, was perhaps the best Italian bomber of World War II, due to its excellent flying qualities and high stability, and by the all-metal twin-engine FIAT BR.20 '*Cicogna*' (*Stork*).

The fighter component fielded the FIAT biplanes CR.32 and CR.42 '*Falco*' (*Hawk*). The former had proved itself in Spain but was now obsolete; the latter, although intended as an interim solution, was to be the mainstay of the fighter arm for the first six months of war. The design of both fighters was driven by the quest for agility with the manoeuvred dogfight as their ideal arena. The CR.32 was powered by the liquid-cooled 600hp V-12 cylinder FIAT A.30 engine with a maximum speed of 360km/h; the CR.42 was equipped with the 870hp air-cooled 14-cylinder FIAT A.74 radial engine which provided a maximum speed of 440km/h. In Albania, both fighters were usually armed with a 12.7mm and a 7.7mm nose-mounted machine gun, in order to save weight and to exploit both the power of the 12.7mm cartridge and the rate of fire of the 7.7mm machine gun.

A FIAT BR.20 en route to the target over Western Greece. In the fully extended Breda turret, the gunner is alert to enemy fighters with his 12.7mm Breda-SAFAT machine gun. (AC)

OPPOSITE ITALIAN BOMBER GROUP FLIGHT FORMATION

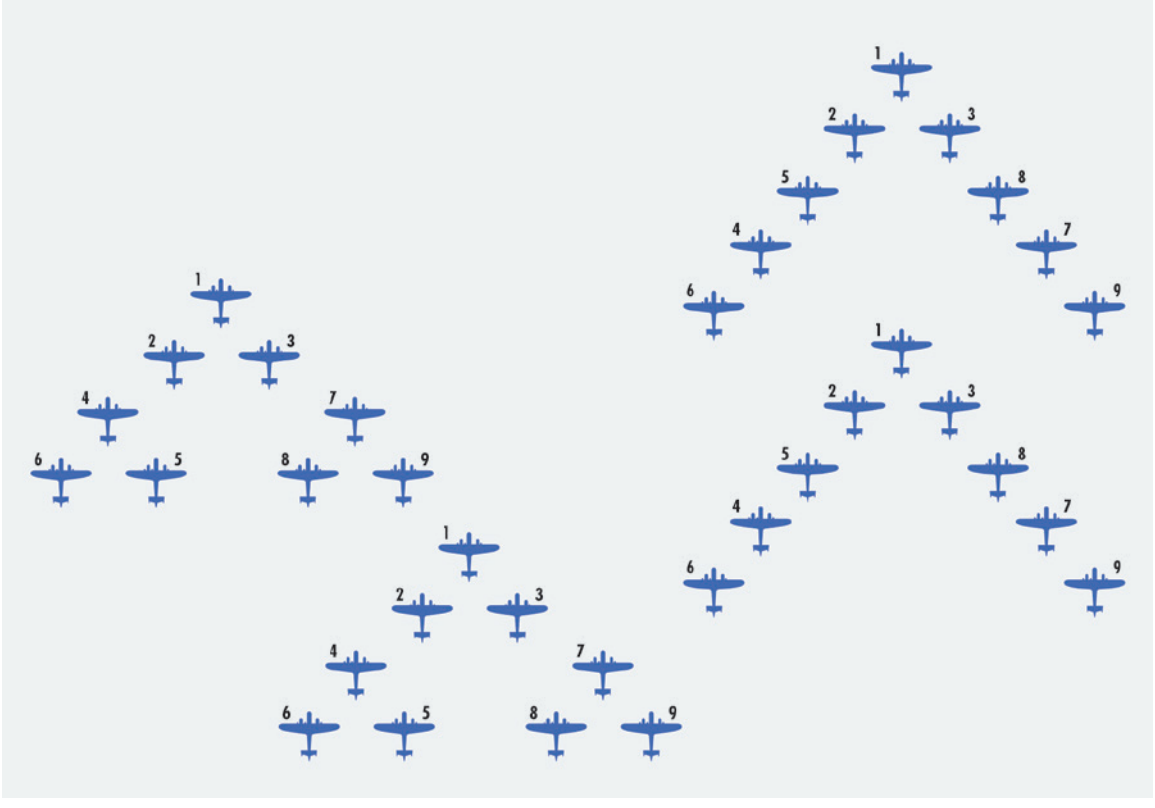
The diagram shows the ideal composition and single aircraft numbering within a Regia Aeronautica bomber group, using a closed or open formation. This kind of patrol was, however, never employed during the war. Most used were formations of three or five aircraft flying in an inverted V or 'wedge' shape with never more than two or three patrols flying in a column. The ideal overall number of 18 aircraft usually shrank to a number of 9 to 15.

Ranza was informed of the invasion plan for Epirus drafted by *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* (Lieutenant General) Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, at the time in charge of all Italian forces in Albania, late in September. It was a surprise since Albania was considered a peripheral region, unlikely to be touched by the war, more so since the tension between Rome and Athens that had built up in August seemed to have faded away. His main task was to bring the local air force infrastructure to a satisfactory level, but now everything changed. On 29 September, Ranza wrote to the Air Staff in Rome asking for reinforcements: one S.79-equipped bomber wing, one dive-bomber squadron, one CR.42-equipped fighter squadron, two G.50- or C.200-equipped fighter squadrons, one tactical reconnaissance flight and two transport flights. He asked also to form a strategic reconnaissance flight at Tirana, and required the operational control of the two bomber wings based in Puglia. The status of the Albanian airfields and the local facilities did not allow for the stationing of more units.

Generale di Squadra Eraldo Ilari was the flag officer in command of the IV Territorial Air Zone, IV Zona Aerea Territoriale (ZAT), in Bari (Puglia). On 1 October 1940, Ilari had the operational control of one maritime bomber wing, one land bomber wing and one fighter squadron:

1. 35° Stormo Bombardamento Marittimo (BM), at Brindisi, with 20 three-engine CANT Z.506 seaplanes, divided between 86° Gruppo (190ª and 191ª Squadriglia) and 95° Gruppo (230ª and 231ª Squadriglia);
2. 37° Stormo BT, at Lecce, with 18 three-engine S.81 bombers of 55° Gruppo (220ª and 221ª Squadriglia) and 18 twin-engine BR.20 bombers of 116° Gruppo (276ª and 277ª Squadriglia);
3. 2° Gruppo CT, at Grottaglie (Taranto), with 17 CR.32 biplanes and 22 FIAT G.50 monoplanes.

Two CANT Z.506Bs of the 191ª and 190ª Squadriglia (86° Gruppo, 35° Stormo BM) moored at their base at Brindisi (Puglia). During the campaign, these seaplanes flew daily reconnaissance missions over the coast of Western Greece down to Navarino and a few bombing missions also against inland targets. (AC)



In July, both maritime and land bombers had been involved in the Battle of Punta Stilo, and during the summer the seaplanes of the 35° Stormo had flown reconnaissance sorties over the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. The 2° Gruppo had been patrolling the sky over the naval bases of Taranto and Brindisi while converting from the CR.32 to the FIAT G.50. This all-metal monoplane fighter was equipped with the same FIAT A.74 engine as the FIAT CR.42, with a maximum speed of 470km/h, and was armed with a pair of nose-mounted 12.7mm Breda-SAFAT machine guns. It was heavier and less agile than the CR.42 and as such required a different mental approach from the pilot.

The RA Chief of Staff, Generale di Squadra Francesco Pricolo, knew of the decision to attack Greece quite late in October. On 21 October, besides sending instructions to his subordinate commanders, Pricolo acted to reinforce both the Air Command for Albania and the IV ZAT, moving bombers and fighters to Albania and Puglia. His aim was for an overall fleet of 400 aircraft. Since the campaign should have been a quick affair, he selected units that were either newly formed or in transition to new types of aircraft in order to give them some combat experience.

As far as IV ZAT was concerned, the 47° Stormo BT, with the 106° and the 107° Gruppi, both equipped with the three-engine CANT Z.1007bis, was to move from Trapani and Ghedi to Grottaglie; the 50° Gruppo BT, also flying CANT Z.1007bis, from Vicenza to Brindisi; the 96° Gruppo Bombardamento a Tuffo (BaT – Dive-Bomber Unit), which was equipped with Junkers Ju 87s, from Comiso, Sicily, to Lecce; while two fighter *squadriglie*, 370ª and 372ª, were transferred from Treviso to Brindisi. Ranza was to receive the 46° Stormo BT, with two S.79 squadrons, 104° and 105°, moving from Pisa and Catania to Tirana; the G.50-equipped 24° Gruppo CT, moving from Sarzana to Tirana; the CR.42-equipped 150° Gruppo CT, transferred from Turin to Argirocastro and Berat. Furthermore

the 40° Gruppo BT of the 38° Stormo was to move from Lecce to Devoli. All these movements were hampered by foul weather, with a low ceiling and heavy rains over most of Italy and Albania. While the 105° Gruppo redeployed at Tirana by 24 October with 17 S.79s, the 24° Gruppo reached Tirana with 24 G.50s on 2 November, the 150° Gruppo arrived in Albania on the same day with 37 CR.42s, and the 104° Gruppo was in Tirana on 3 November with 17 S.79s. Meanwhile, the headquarters of 38° Stormo with the 39° Gruppo moved from Tirana to Valona, where on 28 October the 40° Gruppo also arrived, bringing up to 20 the number of the combat-ready S.81s. The 160° Gruppo moved closer to the border in order to have the 393ª Squadriglia with eight CR.42s and the 394ª with 13 CR.32s at Koritza and Drenovë and the 395ª at Berat with four G.50s, while the 42ª Squadriglia OA reinforced the 72° Gruppo OA moving from Bari to Valona. The 395ª Squadriglia CT was made independent on 2 November and was replaced by the 363ª, from 150° Gruppo, that arrived at Drenovë with 12 CR.42s. The newly arrived units were not fully operational since most of the Albanian airfields had still to be brought to the required standards with personnel and equipment coming from Italy by air and sea. On 28 October, the combat-ready aircraft were 22 S.81s, 14 S.79s, 10 CR.42s, 12 CR.32s and 24 Ro.37bis. Five days later, these numbers were modified to 21 S.81s, 31 S.79s, 20 G.50s, 31 CR.42s, 12 CR.32s, 24 Ro.37bis, which meant 52 bombers, 63 fighters, 24 reconnaissance aircraft for a grand total of 139.

The same pattern can be seen in Puglia, where on 27 October the 96° Gruppo BaT arrived at Lecce with 18 Ju 87s and one S.86, and the 106° Gruppo BT landed at Grottaglie with 15 CANT Z.1007bis. The following day the 107° Gruppo BT joined the 106° at Grottaglie with 15 more CANT Z.1007bis and the 50° Gruppo BT arrived at Brindisi with 16. On 28 October, the combat-ready aircraft were 23 CANT Z.506Bs, 15 S.81s, 16 BR.20s, 43 CANT Z.1007bis, 16 Ju 87s, one S.86, 29 G.50s and nine CR.32s, which meant 97 bombers, 17 dive-bombers, 38 fighters for a grand total of 152 aircraft. Lastly, on 3 November, the 372ª Squadriglia CT redeployed at Brindisi with 8 Macchi C.200s. This was undoubtedly the best Italian fighter, quite agile and capable of more than 500km/h at 5,000m, although it was underpowered and under-armed in comparison with the best of its contemporaries, having the same engine and the same armament as the G.50.

The tight V formation of three CANT Z.1007bis of the 261ª Squadriglia (106° Gruppo, 47° Stormo). The 47° Stormo was the spearhead of the bomber force deployed in Puglia and throughout the campaign was stationed at Grottaglie (Taranto). (AC)

COMPARISON OF ALLIED AND AXIS FORCES				
Unit comparison				
British	Italian	Greek	Yugoslav	German
Command	Squadra Aerea / Zona Aerea	Machitikou		Luftflotte
				Fliegerkorps
Group	Divisione Aerea		Brigada	Fliegerdivision
Wing	Stormo		Puk	Geschwader
Squadron	Gruppo		Grupa	Gruppe
	Squadriglia	Mira	Eskadrila	Staffel
Flight	Sezione			Kette
Officers' ranks				
RAF	Regia Aeronautica	EVA	JKRV	Luftwaffe
Air Chief Marshal	Generale di Armata	Pterarkos		Generaloberst
Air Marshal	Generale di Squadra	Antipterarkos	Armiski General	General der Flieger
Air Vice Marshal	Generale di Divisione	Ypopterarkos	Diviziski General	Generalleutnant
Air Commodore	Generale di Brigata	Taxiarchos	Brigadni General	Generalmajor
Group Captain	Colonnello	Sminarchos	Pukovnik	Oberst
Wing Commander	Tenente Colonnello	Antisminarchos	Potpukovnik	Oberstleutnant
Squadron Leader	Maggiore	Episminagos	Major	Major
Flight Lieutenant	Capitano	Sminagos	Kapetan	Hauptmann
Flying Officer	Tenente	Hiposminagos	Porucnik	Oberleutnant
Pilot Officer	Sottotenente	Anthyposminagos	Potporucnik	Leutnant

Overall Ranza and Ilari could field some 300 combat-ready aircraft, quite short of Pricolo's intended 400 but the logistics could hardly support a larger fleet, mostly due to the limits of the Albanian facilities and of the supply chain from Italy. It is worth noting that for most of the campaign Ilari's fighters did not take part in the operations across the sea and provided only air defence to the air and naval bases in Puglia, as well as to the oil refinery in Bari. Ranza's fighters had therefore to fly air patrols over the relevant Albanian objectives, such as ports and airfields, to grant air cover to the troops by patrolling the sky over the battle area and to ensure direct or indirect escort to the bombers operating from both Albania and Puglia. With the exception of the few Ju 87s, all bombers were designed for medium- or high-altitude bombing and their crews were not trained for ground support missions. Furthermore, they were not used to flying formations of more than five to ten aircraft and usually operated in daylight. The order of battle did not include any dedicated reconnaissance element capable of acting at strategic level and providing an accurate battle damage assessment following the intended raids on inland targets. Fighters and sometimes bombers flew meteorological reconnaissance in the early morning to assess weather conditions over the battle area, while tactical reconnaissance missions were flown by Ro.37bis biplanes under operational control of the army. At the operational level CANT Z.506B seaplanes monitored daily the harbours and the coastal routes of Western Greece.

The initial warning about a potential problem with Yugoslavia was given by Pricolo to his fleet commanders on 11 March 1941. It was the so-called *Esigenza E* (Requirement E) and several *stormi* and *gruppi* were earmarked to move to north-eastern Italy. The orders were issued on 31 March. Yugoslavia and Greece were considered one theatre of operations and the annihilation of Yugoslavia had priority. To this extent the 2nd Air Fleet, 2ª Squadra Aerea, with headquarters in Padova, was brought up to two bomber wings, two bomber squadrons, two fighter wings, one fighter squadron and four night-fighter sections. The 37° Gruppo BT was moved to Aviano from Grottaglie, where it had redeployed in December to operate

The insignia of the RA dive-bomber squadrons painted on the fairing of the undercarriage of a Ju 87. The angry diving woodpecker, *picchio*, in Italian is a sort of a joke, since in Italian 'dive' is *picchiata*, therefore the nickname of '*Picchiatelli*' was given to the RA Ju 87s, bearing in mind that *picchiatello* means 'crazy'. (AC)

against Greece, and the resulting order of battle of the 2ª Squadra Aerea under the command of Generale di Squadra Gennaro Tedeschini Lalli was as follows:

1. 18° Stormo BT (31° Gruppo and 37° Gruppo), Aviano
2. 13° Stormo BT (11° Gruppo and 43° Gruppo), Vicenza
3. 99° Gruppo BT, Treviso
4. 4° Stormo CT (9° Gruppo and 10° Gruppo), Gorizia, Ronchi, Alture di Pola
5. 54° Stormo CT (7° Gruppo and 16° Gruppo), Treviso, Ravenna, Udine
6. Independent fighter section at Falconara (Ancona)
7. Night-fighter sections at Gorizia Treviso, Iesi, Bologna

The night-fighter sections were equipped with three CR.42s each, but all fighter squadrons had the quite capable Macchi C.200 and all bomber squadrons had the all-metal FIAT BR.20. Therefore, Tedeschini Lalli had 90 BR.20s, 150 C.200s and 12 CR.42s. The C.200 monoplane was the best fighter the RA could field and was replacing the FIAT biplanes in all front-line squadrons, while the BR.20, together with the CANT Z.1007bis, was taking over bombing duties from the S.81, which was relegated to transport duties, and the S.79, which was being converted to torpedo-bomber duties.

Ranza's air fleet was reinforced in March by the 22° Gruppo CT, with 37 C.200s, by the 238ª Squadriglia BaT, with 12 Ju 87s, and by the 114ª Squadriglia OA, with nine Ro.37bis, while the 150° Gruppo CT was converted from CR.42s to C.200s. Furthermore, the 208ª Squadriglia BaT with ten Ju 87s redeployed from Lecce to Tirana on 2 April to join the 238ª and form the 101° Gruppo BaT. Since the 40° Gruppo BT at Scutari was now equipped with the BR.20, the Comando Aeronautica Albania was now much more capable than at the start of the campaign against Greece.

In order to reduce the pressure on Albanian airfields and minimize possible counter-aviation targets, on 3 April the 40° Gruppo BT and the S.79-equipped 104° Gruppo BT were moved from Scutari to Foggia, in Puglia, and transferred to Ilari's 4ª Squadra Aerea, which was the operational command established in December to take over the responsibility of the operational tasks assigned to the IV ZAT. On 6 April the Comando Aeronautica Albania had 125 combat-ready aircraft: 39 G.50s, 28 CR.42s, 41 C.200s and 17 Ju 87s. The three tactical reconnaissance squadrons, 5°, 70°, 72° Gruppo OA, had 44 combat-ready Ro.37bis. Ranza's air fleet was

therefore well suited to supporting the army against both the old and the new enemy and to providing air cover against possible threats from Greece or Yugoslavia, while the long-range offensive capability was concentrated in the 4ª Squadra Aerea. Ilari's command was to act against targets in the coastal area from Spalato (Split) to the Albanian border while keeping under control the coast of Western Greece and the Ionian Islands. On 6 April, the 4ª Squadra Aerea could field 47 CANT Z.1007bis, 10 CANT Z.506Bs, 35 BR.20s, 21 S.79s, 4 S.81s, 16 Ju 87s, 40 C.200s, 7 CR.42s, 1 CR.32 (117 bombers, 16 dive-bombers, 48 fighters).

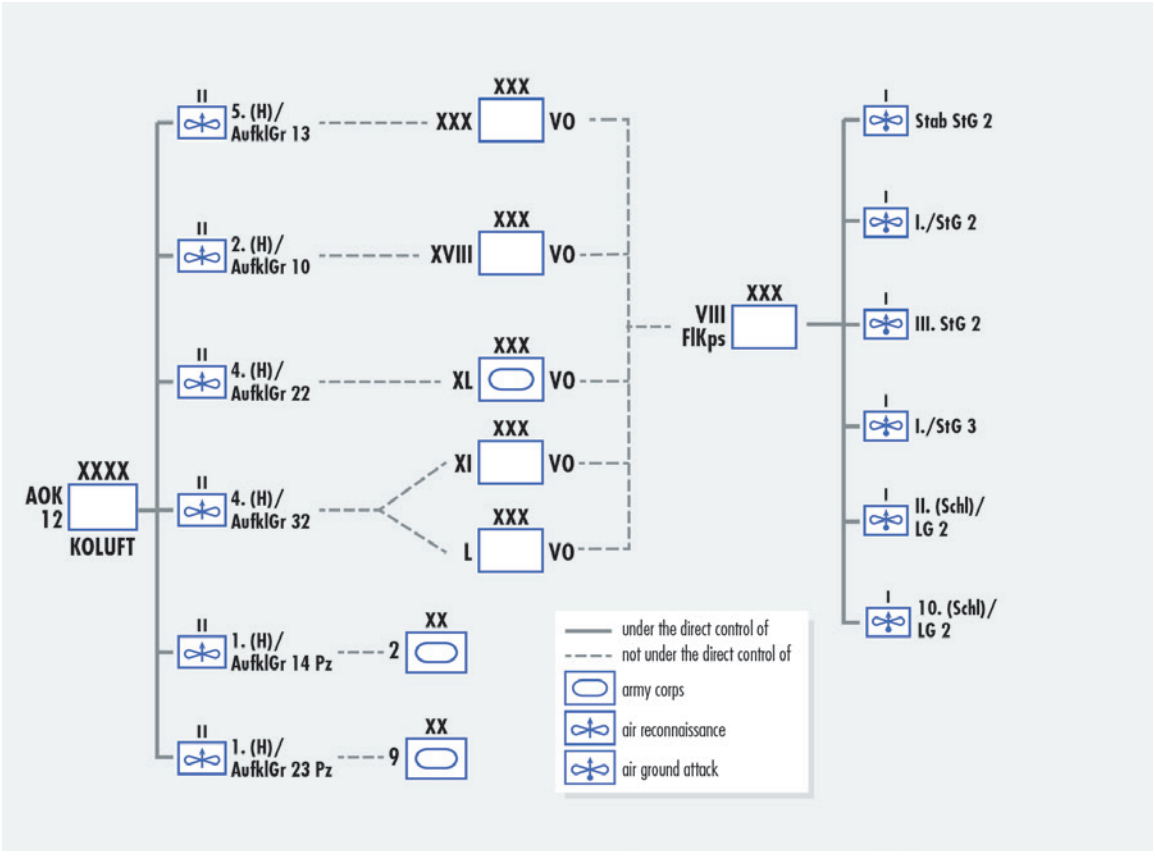
The Luftwaffe

The 1941 Balkan campaign had the Luftwaffe dealing with an unforeseen situation. While the attack plan against Greece was already filed and awaiting execution, the impromptu decision to attack Yugoslavia required a hurried redeployment and on-the-spot solutions. While the latter was mostly a task for Luftflotte 4, the former was the task of General der Flieger Wolfram von Richthofen's VIII. Fliegerkorps. Redeployed to Bulgaria since March 1941, the VIII. Fliegerkorps, Luftwaffe's ground support command, had been reshaped into some kind of all-purpose command with ground-attack units (equipped with Junkers Ju 87 'Stukas', Henschel Hs 123s and the Jagdbomber version of the Messerschmitt Bf 109E), single-engine and two-engine fighter units (Messerschmitt Bf 109Es and Messerschmitt Bf 110s), fast bomber units (Junkers Ju 88s) as well as long-range reconnaissance and transport units (Dornier Do 17s and Junkers Ju 52s).

Early in January 1941, VIII. Fliegerkorps ground support units moved to Romania, the subsequent redeployment to Bulgaria involving the Luftnachrichten Regiment 38 and the Flak Regiment 99, which preceded flying units like the Jagdgeschwader 27, the Zerstörergeschwader 26, the I. Gruppe of Lehrgeschwader 1 (I./LG 1) and the IV. Gruppe, Kampfgruppe z.b.V. 1. The first ground transport columns crossed the Danube and the Bulgarian border on 28 February. In spite of poor roads and bad weather, most of their redeployment was completed by 7 March.

By then, the main airfield in Belica was ready and supplied, while the one in Petrich was still being prepared. North of Petrich a main supply depot was established, with large amounts of bombs and fuel protected by Flak units. The remaining Flak units were detached

Junkers Ju 87 Stuka from Stukageschwader 77 right after redeploying to a captured airfield in April 1941. Given its limited range of about 200km, the Ju 87B needed to be deployed close to the front to be effective in its ground support missions.(Getty)



to the army for the planned attack against the Metaxas Line fortifications, while the corps communications officer, Oberst Rudolf Siber, commander of Luftnachrichten-Regiment 38, set up the telephone and radio network required to make the VIII. Fliegerkorps operational. On 23 March, a special train was prepared for von Richthofen and his staff, with the aim of making the headquarters mobile.

News about Yugoslavia had broken through to VIII. Fliegerkorps headquarters by the end of March, but it was only on the 30th that von Richthofen reconnoitred the airfields close to the Yugoslav border. On that same day new Stuka Gruppen were assigned to VIII. Fliegerkorps, albeit arriving without ground support and vehicles. By 4 April, the corps had eight Gruppen and two independent Staffeln, the number of Gruppen to rise to 15 in just three days, which made the shortage of ground support and vehicles even more acute. All of a sudden, the VIII. Fliegerkorps was first to support the attack against the Rupel Pass and the Metaxas Line, then it was to fight the Yugoslav air force to win air superiority while supporting the advance of the army in southern Yugoslavia, towards Skopje. In the meantime, the VIII. Fliegerkorps was further reinforced by a *Stukagruppe* of the X. Fliegerkorps coming from Sicily, while the few Luftwaffe units in Romania (part of the military mission deployed there) were placed under the tactical command of the local Fliegerführer.

Hitler's sudden decision to attack Yugoslavia following the *putsch* and the subsequent change of government placed the Luftflotte 4's headquarters in a difficult situation, with an urgent need for reinforcements. On 28 March, the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe ordered the redeployment of two Jagdgruppen, seven Kampfgruppen, three Stukagruppen and one Zerstörergruppe from the west to the south-east, on the airfields near Vienna and Graz,

OPPOSITE AIR-TO-GROUND CO-OPERATION IN THE CAMPAIGN IN GREECE

As customary, the Luftwaffe would detach to the army field command (Armee Oberkommando 12 in this case) several Staffel (*Heer*) from the Aufklärungs Gruppe. These were detached by the army's Kommandeur der Luftwaffe (*Koluft*) to the subordinate army corps and Panzer Divisions' commands for employment on the battlefield. These would provide air reconnaissance during the battle. The VIII. Fliegerkorps also assigned its own liaison officers (*Verbindungs Offizier*) to each army corps' command, with the task of securing specific requests for air support during the battle. Ground support to the army formations would then be provided mostly by Stuka and Schlacht Staffel and Gruppe.

in Austria. This grand total of about 500 aircraft could rely on well-prepared airfields and structures, although they were not followed by their own transports and ground personnel which caused logistical problems.

By 5 April 1941, the Luftwaffe had deployed about 27 per cent of its total strength against Yugoslavia and Greece, which was 1,153 aircraft (1,013 operational). The VIII. Fliegerkorps accounted for more than one-third of it, 437 aircraft, 392 of them operational. The aircraft available included 298 single-engine fighters (266 operational), 70 twin-engine fighters (55 operational), 235 bombers (202 operational), 278 Stukas (251 operational), 29 ground-attack aircraft (23 operational). Furthermore, the Luftwaffe's airborne component, the 7. Fliegerdivision, was prepared for an airborne operation aimed at seizing the Greek island of Lemnos (Operation *Hannibal*).

Even though the Luftwaffe could rely on numerical superiority, the multitude of tasks it was required to perform prevented a concentration of effort, making such a superiority less relevant. The missions specifically laid down for the VIII. Fliegerkorps for the assault on Greece were to support ground operations on the mainland and, at the same time, to gain air superiority. The inclusion of Yugoslavia in the attack plan widened the scope of the operation, pushing the attacker's capabilities to their very limit. This situation explains the bombing of Belgrade, which was not just retaliation for the Yugoslav about-face. In fact, its purpose was to paralyse the country from the very beginning, in order to jeopardize any co-ordinated defence effort. This speeded up the defeat of Yugoslavia, solving the German problem of having to fight two separate air campaigns.

General der Flieger Wolfram von Richthofen portrayed here on the Eastern Front while speaking with Oberst Bormann, Kommodore KG 76. Von Richthofen was the acclaimed Luftwaffe's expert on ground support operations. (Getty)

DEFENDER'S CAPABILITIES

The Allied forces

A group of JKRV pilots posing in front of a brand new Rogožarski IK-3 fighter. Although considered on the same level as the Messerschmitt Bf 109, the few available numbers (12 produced by April 1941) did not permit its proper evaluation. (Alamy)

Royal Hellenic Air Force

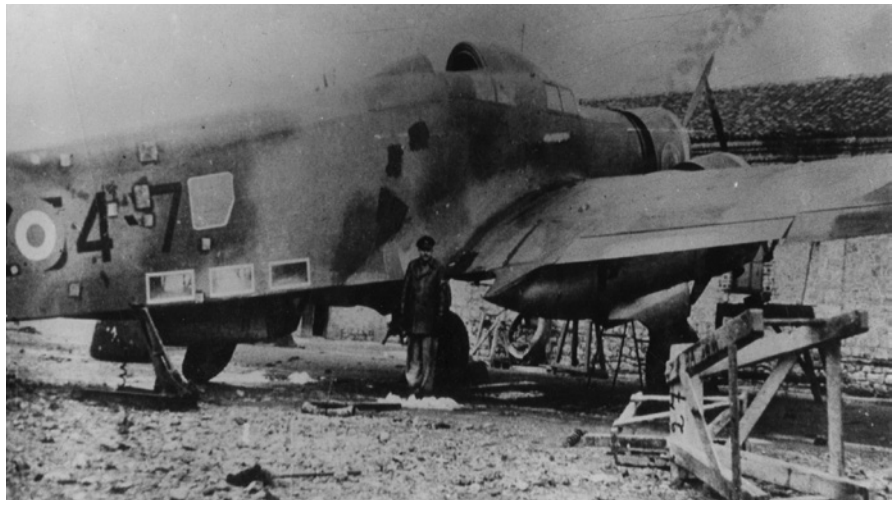
The *Elliniki Vasiliki Aeroporia* (Royal Hellenic Air Force, EVA) had solid roots, Greece having first used aircraft in war in 1912, one year after the establishment of the air service and just after the Italians used aircraft against the Turks in Libya. In 1913, Greece was the first nation to use aircraft in co-operation with the navy. This experience provided an adequate foundation for the official creation of the Air Ministry in 1930. The biggest hindrance to the development of an air force was the absence of a significant aviation industry, which compelled procuring aircraft abroad. The first large-scale purchase was in 1922, with the acquisition of 25 Gloster Mk VI Nighthawks, and was followed in 1928 by the acquisition of two Armstrong Whitworth Atlases for the naval air service. Ten of these were built on licence by Kratikon Ergostasion Aeroplanon (KEA), the national aircraft factory. In 1931 Greece turned to France, this time purchasing 30 Breguet XIXs followed by 30 Potez 30s, while the naval air service remained loyal to the British industry with six Hawker Horsley IIs, followed by six Fairey IIIF seaplanes. The economic crisis of the 1930s prevented a major renovation of the fleet. Apart from two Avro training aircraft built by the KEA, the only additions were seven Avia B-534 biplane fighters from Yugoslavia. Following the rise to power of Ioannis Metaxas in 1936, a rearmament plan led to the acquisition of 36 PZL P.24 Polish fighters, 30 F variant and 6 G variant, modified according to Greek specifications. Both variants had the same engine, the 970hp Gnome-Rhône 14N-07, but different armament. The P.24 F had two 20mm guns, two 7.7mm machine guns and two 50kg bomb racks; the P.24 G had four machine guns and four 12.5kg bomb racks. Delays in the supply of the new engine slowed down production, the aircraft being eventually assembled near Athens by Polish technicians in 1938. Given the shortage of 20mm ammunition, in 1940 all PZL P.24 Fs were converted to P.24 Gs, with four 7.7mm machine guns. In 1937, Stylianos Sarpakis, a Greek businessman living in Egypt, donated two Gloster Gladiator Mk Is to the EVA, and in 1939 Greece placed an order for 24 Marcel Bloch MB.151 fighters from France, but only nine were delivered before the fall of France.

Greece mostly relied on 37 and 20mm guns for anti-aircraft defence, but also on 39 88mm Flak 18s acquired from Germany. Of these, 24 were given to the Army to form anti-aircraft regiments mostly used in the defence of Athens. (Athens War Museum)

In 1940, the EVA mostly relied on the PZL P.24 fighters and the Henschel Hs 126 tactical reconnaissance aircraft purchased from Germany, the bombers being a dozen each of Bristol Blenheim Mk IVs and Fairey Battle Mk Is supplemented by 11 Potez 63s. Greece had placed an order for 24 of these from France but the other 13 had been taken over by the *Armée de l'Air* (French Air Force). Some older aircraft were still in use either in a support role or for training. In October 1940, the EVA fielded some 150 operational aircraft, 78 of them in front-line units with a quite impressive rate of serviceability: 24 PZL P.24s (out of 36), 9 Bloch MB 141s, 8 Potez 63s (out of 11), 11 Bristol Blenheim Mk IVs (out of 12), 10 Fairey Battle Mk Is (out of 12) and 16 Hs 126s. The order of battle was as follows:

1. Bomber Command with Mira (*squadrons*) 31, 32 and 33 in the Larissa–Volos area;
2. Fighter Command with Mira 21, 22, 23 and 24 in eastern Greece (Salonika–Trikkala–Larissa–Athens);
3. Army Co-operation Command with Mira 1 (transformed into a training unit since December 1940), 2, 3 and 4 and 2828 Independent Flight, with Hs 126s, Potez 25s and Breguet XIXs;
4. Naval Air Command with Mira 11, 12 and 13 mostly stationed in the south-eastern part of the country, with Fairey IIIF and Dornier Do 22 seaplanes and Avro Anson Mk Is.

Several factors affected the fighting capabilities of the EVA. The lack of spare parts (particularly for the Polish, French and German aircraft) further complicated the already complex issue of maintenance. Furthermore, the most suitable airfields were in the Athens and Salonika areas, the rest consisting of simple landing strips that heavy rain and melting snow usually rendered unserviceable, which went along with the lack of facilities, inadequate accommodation, both for personnel and aircraft, poor hygiene and the absence of a communications network. These shortcomings became a real factor as the army advanced into Albania and the EVA squadrons were moved to airfields in Western Greece. In spite of the high morale, and the undoubted ingenuity and efficiency of the ground crews, the long-lasting war took its toll on the flying units, due also to the limited replacements provided by the United Kingdom, with the EVA receiving just 17 Gladiator Mk Is (to 21 Mira) and 6 Blenheim Mk Is (to 32 Mira). In January 1941, the EVA front line was down to 28 PZL



An unserviceable Savoia-Marchetti S.79 bomber captured at Koritza by the Greeks and subsequently pressed into service by the Royal Hellenic Air Force. Only the Greek national roundels have been added. (Hellenic Air Force Historical Branch)

P.24s, 12 Gladiator Is, 6 Bloch 151s, 8 Potez 63s, 6 Blenheims and 7 Fairey Battles, plus 68 other aircraft, with an average serviceability of about 50 per cent. The EVA proved its fighting capabilities against the RA but in the long run it could not carry on fighting with the same level of efficiency and at the end it was so worn out that when the Luftwaffe's onslaught arrived it was no longer an effective player.

Royal Yugoslav Air Force

The *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo* (Royal Yugoslav Air Force, JKRV) originated from the Serbian Aviation Command formed in 1912 and was established as such in 1919, following the birth of Yugoslavia. The chief of the fledgling air force was the former head of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal Aviation Troops, Major General Emil Uzelac.

A relatively poor country, Yugoslavia attempted to impose some limits to the import of foreign aircraft in order to develop its own aircraft industry. In 1923 the Ikarus company was established with headquarters in Novi Sad. Just as the first Brandenburg-type trainer rolled out of the Ikarus factory in 1924, Yugoslavia purchased 150 Breguet XIX twin-seat reconnaissance aircraft from France, followed in 1927 by 79 Dewoitine D.1 fighters. In 1927, the Air Command decided that Ikarus should start the production of military aircraft and to this purpose a new factory was built in Zemun, in the outskirts of Belgrade. At first the Ikarus plant manufactured several foreign designs under licence such as the French Potez 25 twin-seat multi-purpose aircraft (240 built), the Czechoslovakian Avia BH-33E-SHS fighter (22 built) and the British Hawker Fury fighter (24 built). In April 1934, the first Ikarus-designed fighter, the IK-2, came out of the factory. This high-wing, single-seat monoplane was ready for production only in 1939, 12 being built, and in 1941 just eight were still flying. At the end of the 1930s Ikarus started producing the British Bristol Blenheim bomber (16 built) while developing its own bomber. In 1924 Zivojin Rogozarski had also opened its aircraft-manufacturing plant at Belgrade, building a series of successful biplane trainers. Out of this factory came the twin-engine SIM-XIV-H seaplane in 1938 and in 1939 the IK-3, a low-wing fighter with a retractable undercarriage that was considered comparable to aircraft such as the Messerschmitt Bf 109E. In 1940, 12 Rogozarski IK-3s were produced and 25 more were still on the production line when Germany attacked in 1941. Zmaj, which was established in 1927, was the third, and smallest, Yugoslav aircraft company other than the national factory at Kraljevo. Zmaj also produced several training aircraft but focused on

The pilots of 22 Mira posing in front of their PZL P.24 fighters. The Greek pilots showed great skill and courage, fighting continuously for six months with obsolete aircraft against an enemy that was superior in number. (Athens War Museum)

licenced production, such as the French Gourdou-Leseurre GL.2 monoplane fighter (26 built), the Hawker Fury (16 built) and the Hurricane Mk I (20 out of 100 built by April 1941). Meanwhile more aircraft were purchased abroad, including 73 Messerschmitt Bf 109E fighters and 29 Dornier Do 17K bombers from Germany, with 40 more Do 17Ks built at Kraljevo, 47 Hawker Hurricane Mk Is and 21 Bristol Blenheim Mk Is from the United Kingdom, and 42 Savoia-Marchetti S.79 bombers from Italy.

The frantic acquisition of foreign aircraft and the contemporary procurement of Yugoslav-built types created a logistical mayhem; in 1941 there were 25 types of aircraft in service, with 22 engine types and four machine-gun types. The home-built version of the Dornier Do 17 had French engines, Yugoslav instruments, Belgian weapons and Czech photographic equipment. Domestic, political and ethnic conflicts were another major issue. In 1932, the 2nd Air Regiment of Sarajevo was afflicted with problems of morale and discipline bordering

A Hawker Hurricane Mk I of the JKRV in flight, clearly showing the national roundels and what seems to be a three-tone camouflage. Most Yugoslav Hurricanes were assigned to 33., 34. and 52. Grupa deployed in central Yugoslavia. (IWM)

OPPOSITE YUGOSLAVIAN AIR BASES 1941

on mutiny that required strong measures. This certainly did not facilitate the development of a centralized air defence, since centralizing was strongly opposed by all non-Serbians. A result of this uneasy internal situation was the case of Kapetan Vladimir Kren, who on 3 April 1941 defected with his Potez 25 to Germany, taking with him some restricted documents.

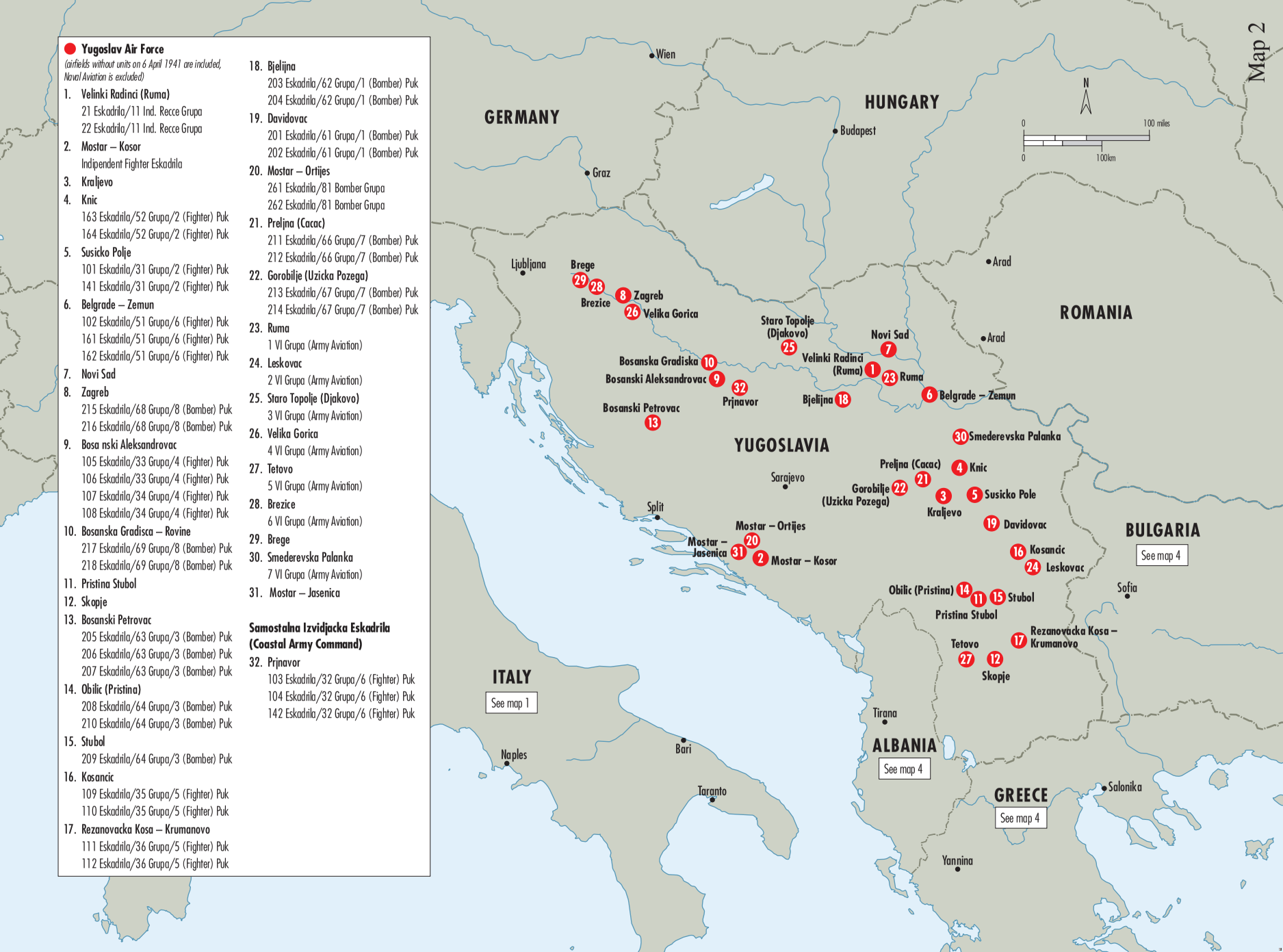
In 1941 the JKRV was numerically strong and quite well equipped with some 460 front-line aircraft, 340 of which were operational in the fighter and bomber units. As for the fighters, there were 52 Messerschmitt Bf 109Es, 31 Hawker Hurricane Mk Is, 31 Hawker Furys, 15 IK-2s and IK-3s. Bombers included 60 Dornier Do 17Ks, 58 Blenheim Mk Is and 39 Savoia-Marchetti S.79s. The ground-attack component fielded, on the other hand, mostly outdated types, such as some 90 Breguet XIX biplanes. The JKRV had some 2,000 pilots and a corresponding number of ground crew.

In order to adhere to the army plan of defence, which called for deployment along almost all of Yugoslavia's borders, and to avoid destruction on the ground, the JKRV prepared some 100 auxiliary airfields, 50 of which were ready by April 1941. Following the secret mobilization on 6 March 1941, by the 12th the JKRV had started its dispersal, which was completed by 20 March, the intended deployment having been (partly at least) revealed by Kren. These airfields turned out to be extremely primitive and were not connected to any kind of communication network, leaving each unit to fight on its own. As the Luftwaffe attacked, in spite of its solid aeronautical tradition and relatively strong (numerically at least) air force, Yugoslavia soon found itself fighting against the odds.

Royal Air Force

On paper, the Royal Air Force was well suited to outmatch the Regia Aeronautica and to confront effectively the Luftwaffe. However, several factors affected the RAF's capabilities during the 1940–41 operations in Greece and in the Balkans and undermined its fighting effectiveness. The first was the RAF's structure, based on operational commands (Fighter, Bomber, Coastal, Training) and theatre commands, such as the Middle East Command, which did not provide for the possible redeployment of air units to other theatres. Those units that eventually redeployed had to rely on local facilities and support, which in the case of Greece turned out to be far from adequate. A second factor was the piecemeal commitment, which went along with the developing situation in North Africa. The arrival of German troops in Libya prevented redeploying RAF units to Greece as planned, with the result that those eventually sent were too weak to influence the outcome of the air campaign.

As Air Vice Marshal J.H. D'Albiac arrived in Athens on 6 November 1940 as commanding officer of Operation *Barbarity*, elements from No.30 Squadron, a mixed fighter/bomber Bristol Blenheim Mk I unit, had just arrived at the Eleusis airfield near Athens. The *Barbarity* force grew during November to include two more Bristol Blenheim bomber squadrons, No.84 and No.211, and No.80 Squadron, with Gloster Gladiator biplane fighters. No.70 Squadron, with Vickers Wellington twin-engine bombers, was also made available from Egypt and temporarily stationed at Tatoi, while the Gloster Gladiators of No.112 Squadron that arrived on 2 December 1940 were immediately handed over to the EVA to offset losses. To support these units D'Albiac had the 31st and 33rd Air Stores Parks, established at Daphni, but nevertheless he had to rely on the Greek airfields which proved to be largely inadequate. The only suitable ones were located in the Athens area, and as such they were not suited to the Gladiator fighters, being almost 500km away from the front. To add further


Map 2
Yugoslav Air Force
(airfields without units on 6 April 1941 are included, Naval Aviation is excluded)
1. Velinki Radinci (Ruma)
21 Eskadrila/11 Ind. Recce Grupa
22 Eskadrila/11 Ind. Recce Grupa
2. Mostar – Kosor
Indipendent Fighter Eskadrila
3. Kraljevo
4. Knic
163 Eskadrila/52 Grupa/2 (Fighter) Puk
164 Eskadrila/52 Grupa/2 (Fighter) Puk
5. Susicko Polje
101 Eskadrila/31 Grupa/2 (Fighter) Puk
141 Eskadrila/31 Grupa/2 (Fighter) Puk
6. Belgrade – Zemun
102 Eskadrila/51 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
161 Eskadrila/51 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
162 Eskadrila/51 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
7. Novi Sad
8. Zagreb
215 Eskadrila/68 Grupa/8 (Bomber) Puk
216 Eskadrila/68 Grupa/8 (Bomber) Puk
9. Bosa nski Aleksandrovac
105 Eskadrila/33 Grupa/4 (Fighter) Puk
106 Eskadrila/33 Grupa/4 (Fighter) Puk
107 Eskadrila/34 Grupa/4 (Fighter) Puk
108 Eskadrila/34 Grupa/4 (Fighter) Puk
10. Bosanska Gradisca – Rovine
217 Eskadrila/69 Grupa/8 (Bomber) Puk
218 Eskadrila/69 Grupa/8 (Bomber) Puk
11. Pristina Stubol
12. Skopje
13. Bosanski Petrovac
205 Eskadrila/63 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
206 Eskadrila/63 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
207 Eskadrila/63 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
14. Obilic (Pristina)
208 Eskadrila/64 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
210 Eskadrila/64 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
15. Stubol
209 Eskadrila/64 Grupa/3 (Bomber) Puk
16. Kosancic
109 Eskadrila/35 Grupa/5 (Fighter) Puk
110 Eskadrila/35 Grupa/5 (Fighter) Puk
17. Rezanovacka Kosa – Krumanovo
111 Eskadrila/36 Grupa/5 (Fighter) Puk
112 Eskadrila/36 Grupa/5 (Fighter) Puk
18. Bjelijna
203 Eskadrila/62 Grupa/1 (Bomber) Puk
204 Eskadrila/62 Grupa/1 (Bomber) Puk
19. Davidovac
201 Eskadrila/61 Grupa/1 (Bomber) Puk
202 Eskadrila/61 Grupa/1 (Bomber) Puk
20. Mostar – Ortijes
261 Eskadrila/81 Bomber Grupa
262 Eskadrila/81 Bomber Grupa
21. Preljna (Cacac)
211 Eskadrila/66 Grupa/7 (Bomber) Puk
212 Eskadrila/66 Grupa/7 (Bomber) Puk
22. Gorobilje (Uzicka Pozega)
213 Eskadrila/67 Grupa/7 (Bomber) Puk
214 Eskadrila/67 Grupa/7 (Bomber) Puk
23. Ruma
1 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
24. Leskovac
2 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
25. Staro Topolje (Djakovo)
3 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
26. Velika Gorica
4 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
27. Tetovo
5 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
28. Brezice
6 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
29. Brege
30. Smederevska Palanka
7 VI Grupa (Army Aviation)
31. Mostar – Jasenica
Samostalna Izvidjacka Eskadrila (Coastal Army Command)
32. Prjnavor
103 Eskadrila/32 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
104 Eskadrila/32 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
142 Eskadrila/32 Grupa/6 (Fighter) Puk
N
0
100 miles
0
100km
Wien
GERMANY
HUNGARY
Budapest
Graz
Ljubljana
Brege
Brezice
Zagreb
Velika Gorica
Staro Topolje (Djakovo)
Novi Sad
Arad
ROMANIA
Bosanska Gradiska
Bosanski Aleksandrovac
Velinki Radinci (Ruma)
Ruma
Belgrade – Zemun
Prjnavor
Bjelijna
Bosanski Petrovac
YUGOSLAVIA
Smederevska Palanka
Preljna (Cacac)
Knic
Sarajevo
Gorobilje (Uzicka Pozega)
Susicko Pole
Kraljevo
Split
Mostar – Ortijes
Davidovac
BULGARIA
See map 4
Mostar – Jasenica
Mostar – Kosor
Kosancic
Leskovac
Obilic (Pristina)
Stubol
Pristina Stubol
Sofia
Rezanovacka Kosa – Krumanovo
Tetovo
Skopje
ITALY
See map 1
Tirana
Naples
Bari
ALBANIA
See map 4
Taranto
Salonika
GREECE
See map 4
Yannina

A Bristol Blenheim Mk I of RAF No.211 Squadron at Paramythia, one of the mountain-sited airfields used by the *Barbarity* force which, albeit in better shape than other airfields, proved difficult to reach and supply.(IWM)

complications, bad weather prevented large-scale operations. As a result, RAF capabilities in the last months of 1940 were quite limited, the *Barbarity* Blenheim bomber force carrying out only 235 sorties between November and December, 56 of which were aborted due to the weather. Fighter activity focused on the protection of the Larissa area, where one Gladiator squadron was deployed, but this task soon became redundant following the Italian withdrawal and the subsequent change of priorities for the Regia Aeronautica.

Controversies with the Greek government and Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Alexandros Papagos, did not ease the situation. D'Albiac reckoned that the Salonika area was best suited to hosting his air units, but the Greeks were opposed to the idea since they did not want to provoke the Germans with a move that could be considered a threat to the Romanian oilfields. Without prior consultation, the Greek Prime Minister Metaxas offered to build two all-weather airfields at Araxos and Missolonghi, just north of the Gulf of Corinth. D'Albiac's staff considered both places unsuitable as well, which eventually did not matter since these airfields were never built. As a consequence, RAF Middle East Command came to the conclusion that sending further reinforcements to Greece would be pointless, and that RAF squadrons' best use was in North Africa.

The controversy between D'Albiac and the Greeks also involved the issue of the RAF's role in the campaign. The decision to focus on the bombing of the Albanian harbours of Valona and Durazzo proves that D'Albiac succeeded in securing RAF influence on the air operations, conducting them according to British pre-war doctrine that paid little attention to air-to-ground co-operation. However, it is hard to assess to what extent the Blenheim raids, and the limited number of Wellington sorties against those harbours, contributed to the war effort. During the campaign the Italians suffered from delayed arrival of reinforcements and shortage of supplies, but this was mainly, if not exclusively, due to their own poor logistics and the inadequacy of the Albanian ports of debarkation. In December, the arrival of the No.53 RSU (Repair and Salvage Unit) at Hassani provided the maintenance capability lacking so far. Then, between January and March 1941, *Barbarity* fighting capability was strengthened by the arrival of the Hawker Hurricane-equipped No.33 Squadron, while more Hurricanes were assigned to No.80 Squadron, which became a mixed Hurricane and Gladiator unit. Further reinforcements included the Bristol Blenheims of No.11 and No.113 Squadrons, along with No.208 Air Co-operation Squadron which was equipped with Hurricanes and

Lysanders. As a result, the same number of sorties were flown, 235, although 76 aborted due to bad weather.

In February and in March, several raids were launched against Italian airfields and depots in Albania with mixed results and significant losses for the Blenheim force, while the Italian harbours of Bari and Brindisi were repeatedly bombed at night by the Wellingtons using inadequate Greek ordnance due to the lack of proper bomb supplies. A rudimentary early warning net was created using Greek observers connected to the nearest fighter base by telephone. The poor state of the telephone network, with only one available landline, did not allow timely advance warning of enemy planes to fighter units. They were often reported with hours of delay. Therefore, air combat was often only brought about by occasional encounters following fighter sweeps over the battle area by fighter squadrons, as well as escort missions in support of Bristol Blenheim bombers. When the Hurricanes entered the fray, dive and zoom tactics were preferred to manoeuvre dogfights, in order to exploit their speed advantage and superior firepower.

By mid-February RAF Blenheim had flown 108 sorties in support of the Greek Army, which greatly appreciated the gesture. In all, 90 further sorties were flown by 4 March, RAF fighters claiming in the same period 62 Italian aircraft and 13 unconfirmed. On 28 February

The crew of the Blenheim Mk I VA-G of RAF No.84 Squadron preparing to board their aircraft at the Menidi/Tatoi airfield before a bombing mission in Albania. This aircraft was lost on 7 December 1940 during a raid on Valona when, after being damaged by three CR.42s of 365ª Squadriglia, it crash-landed near Sarandë.(IWM)

A permanent link between the *Barbarity* force in Greece and the RAF Middle East Command was secured by the use of the Bristol Bombays of RAF No.216 Squadron, which were mostly used in the early stage of deployment to carry personnel and baggage.(IWM)

A Blenheim Mk I of A Flight, RAF No.30 Squadron is preparing for a raid on Albania. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac used the *Barbarity* force bombers to attack the Italian harbours in Albania in spite of Greek requests to use them in support of the Greek Army.(IWM)

1941, RAF pilots claimed 27 victories against the loss of a single Gloster Gladiator, but it is now well known the actual Italian losses were four bombers and two fighters. In spite of grossly overestimated claims, the truth is that the RAF was never able to stop the RA bombers, which were blocked only by the weather. It has to be stressed that foul weather, which was hard to predict and turned out to be the worst in all Europe, greatly influenced flying operations on both sides.

The arrival of Luftwaffe's X. Fliegerkorps in Sicily and of the Afrika Korps in Libya between January and February 1941 strengthened Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore's attitude. No further reinforcements would be sent to Greece in spite of D'Albiac's requests while, in spite of the arrival of German troops in Bulgaria, the Greek government persisted in denying the use of the airfields in the Salonika area. The most obvious result was that D'Albiac's force, on the eve of the German attack, was in a quite unsuitable position to show its full capabilities.

By April it became clear that no co-operation could be eventually achieved with Yugoslavia in spite of the German threat, which meant the RAF would fight alone (in addition, the EVA was now down to a very few serviceable aircraft). Numbers hardly allowed for a fair confrontation with the Luftwaffe, the *Barbarity* force having some 200 aircraft (40 per cent fighters, 40 per cent bombers), 82 of them serviceable. Unserviceability mostly affected the Gladiators, with 15 aircraft under repair for a two-week estimated time period (28 per cent of the total force); the Blenheims, 18 of which were under repair (21 per cent); and the Hurricanes, the five aircraft in repair amounting to 20 per cent of the total strength. The available aircraft were split between two commands, each one devoted to a specific task. The Eastern Wing was to deal with the imminent German onslaught, and it included four squadrons stationed north-west of Larissa (one Hurricane fighter squadron, one Hurricane air co-operation squadron, two Blenheim squadrons). The Western Wing was to support the Greek Army in Albania. It operated from the Yannina (Ioannina)–Paramythia area with one Gladiator and one Blenheim squadron complemented, since 11 March, by six Royal Navy Swordfish torpedo-bombers intended to attack Durazzo and Valona. Two fighter squadrons, including the now Hurricane fully equipped No.80 Squadron, and one Blenheim squadron, were held in reserve near Athens, along with detachments of No.37 and No.38 Squadrons (Wellingtons). No improvement had been made either to the airfields or the communication system. The latter was still based on the landline telephone network, which made the HQ all too often unable to contact the airfields. They were also in most cases unprotected, since in April 1941 only three anti-aircraft batteries were under RAF control for airfield defence.

OPPOSITE
A Macchi C.200 preparing to take off. This agile monoplane was the best fighter the RA could field in 1940. It had the same FIAT A.74 870hp radial engine and the same armament as the G.50, with two 12.7mm machine guns, but was faster and more manoeuvrable.(AC)

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

The Italian objectives

The actual reasons behind the 1940–41 Balkans campaign are hard to ascertain, as are the objectives. For sure, Mussolini aimed to bully Athens into submission, which accounts, in part at least, for the Italian lack of preparedness and even for the absence of a real invasion plan. The one drafted by the Italian commander in Albania, Generale di Corpo d'Armata Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, merely aimed at the seizure of the border region of Tsamuria. This plan, developed in August 1940 under the codename of '*Esigenza G*' (for Greece), was hurriedly turned into a proper invasion plan in October by the acting Army Chief of Staff, Generale di Corpo d'Armata (*Lieutenant General*) Mario Roatta. It was nothing more than an extension of Visconti Prasca's plan envisaging an advance to Yannina and towards Kozani to seize Tsamuria and most of Epirus, building the base for a subsequent advance to Athens along the Yannina–Trikkala–Thermopylae route. The plan did not consider a greater number of divisions than that intended for the Tsamuria coup de main, and relied on the assumption that the Greek Army was not going to put up much of a fight. The rushed Italian move had the Regio Esercito, and the Regia Aeronautica as well, still completing their preparations at the time of the attack, with the result that shortages of all kinds were experienced from the very beginning of the campaign.

The bombload on a Light Series Carrier fitted underneath a Blenheim Mk I is being checked before a mission over Albania, the aircraft belonging to RAF No.30 Squadron based at Eleusis and provisionally used for ground attack in support of the Greek Army.(IWM)

In a last meeting held on 24 October, the Chief of General Staff, Maresciallo d'Italia (Field Marshal) Pietro Badoglio, confirmed the operational concept of a coup de main to be executed swiftly in order to avoid the stiffening of Greek resistance. He also vetoed Pricolo's proposal to carry out a few reconnaissance sorties to ascertain the deployment of the enemy's forces, since these could have alarmed the Greeks. It was like entering the fray blindfolded but Pricolo could only obey. The following day he issued the initial orders based on the

OPPOSITE GREEK AND ITALIAN AIR BASES 1940

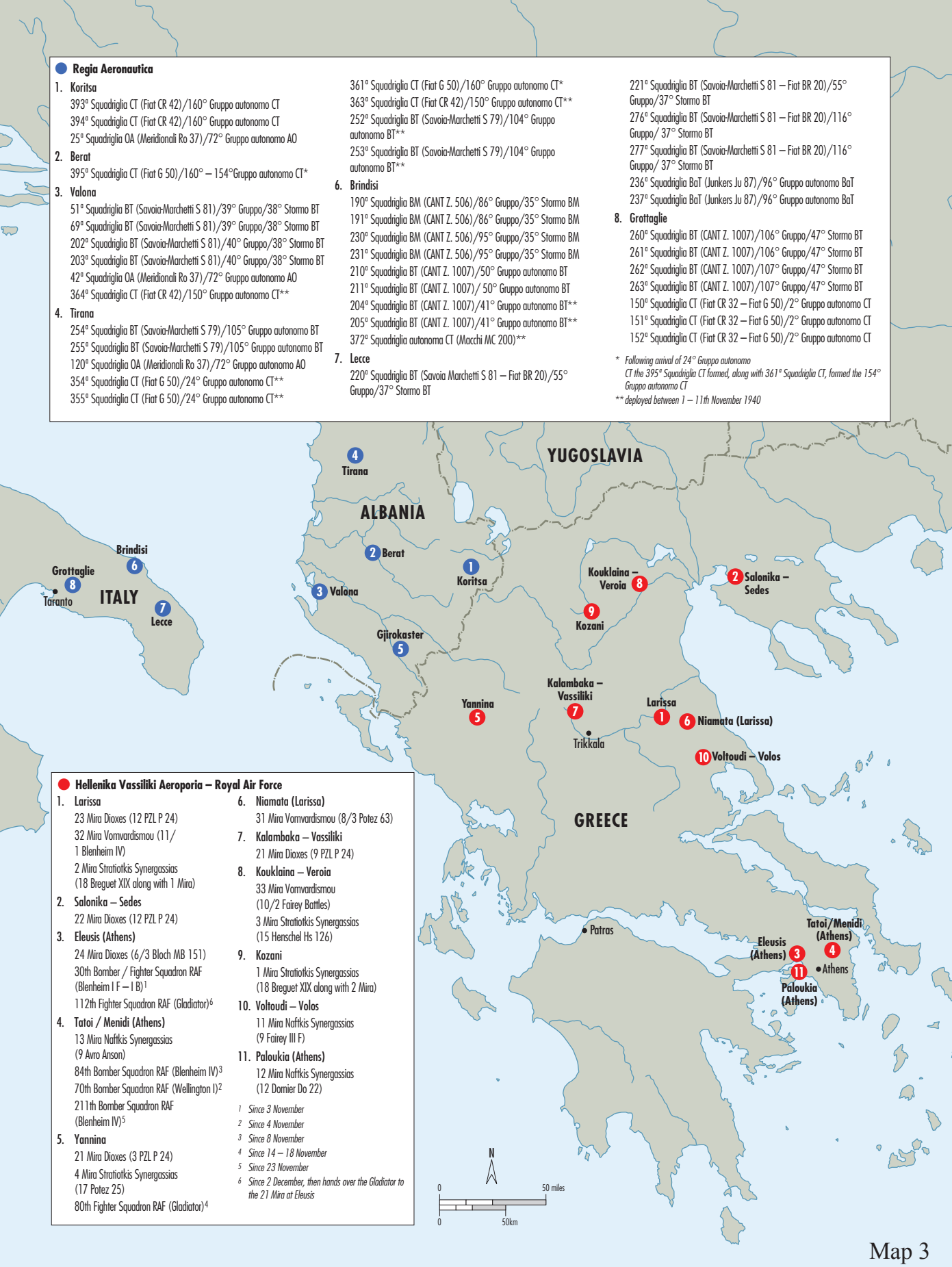
directives already given on 15 October with regards to the so-called '*Esigenza G*'. The RA was to conduct its own campaign with the aim of suppressing any offensive capability of the EVA and of downgrading the overall combat potential of the enemy by striking at its industrial and logistics facilities. As Roatta had written to Visconti Prasca on 23 October, the main task of the Air Command for Albania was counter-aviation and therefore it was not wise to disrupt this effort by asking it to perform other tasks. With these words, Roatta ruled out all kinds of ground support, with the exception of what could be provided by the tactical reconnaissance squadron under the operational control of the army. The Air Staff was keen to exploit the possibility of acting in an independent way, very much in accordance with the ideas of Giulio Douhet perhaps the greatest air power theorist of the XX Century, with regard to the air force's autonomous capability, but did not comply with Douhet's prescriptions about a concentrated use of air power both in space and time.

Giulio Douhet (1869–1930), one of the most brilliant officers in the Italian Army, was outspoken and a harsh critic which did not help his career. Although not a pilot, Douhet was a strong supporter of aviation as an independent service and was a resolute advocate of its decisive role in conflict. He is best known for his book *The Command of the Air* (*Il dominio dell'aria*), first published in 1921 in which he stressed the importance of gaining air superiority in order to strike, at will, the very source of combat power of the enemy, i.e. major industrial cities. One of the leading air-power theorists along with Hugh Trenchard and Billy Mitchell, Douhet is still studied today. (Alamy)

Pricolo's orders gave priority to counter-aviation, but the relatively few bomber squadrons deployed in Puglia and Albania were also given the task of neutralizing the major naval bases, destroying logistics facilities, supporting the landing of a division on the island of Corfu and, last but not least, preventing British forces from settling in Crete. The IV ZAT bombers were to focus on the airfields in Western Greece, from Epirus to Peloponnese, while also attacking the naval bases at Salamina, Piraeus and Patras, the bridges over the Corinth Canal and any enemy vessel at sea, at the same time supporting the planned landing on Corfu and disrupting any British move towards Crete. The Air Command for Albania was instead to attack the airfields in north-eastern Greece and in Thessalia, the ports of Salonika and Preveza and to support the army in Epirus and Western Macedonia by carrying out battlefield interdiction operations. The Air Command for the Aegean Sea, or Aeronautica dell'Egeo, from the Dodecanese, and the 5ª Squadra Aerea, from Libya, were to act against the Royal Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the naval and air bases on the island of Crete. The plan did overestimate the effectiveness of high-altitude bombing, stating that in order to achieve the intended results, each target had to be attacked by one flight of bombers, while many more would have been needed.

Bad weather hampered the execution of these orders and in ten days the plan itself was discarded due to the situation developing on the ground, with the Italian offensive first halted and then countered. With the landing on Corfu cancelled on 1 November, two days later Badoglio ordered that, while the Comando Aeronautica Albania was to act against the enemy troops in Epirus and in the Koritza, and the Western Macedonia sector, the IV ZAT bombers were to attack those battlefield interdiction targets required by the army headquarters in Albania. Pricolo was not pleased and for a few days Italian bombers carried on attacking mainly targets quite far from the battle area. Then, on 7 November, he complied and ordered Ranza to use his bombers in the Koritza sector, while also executing airdrop operations over the Pindus Range to supply the beleaguered Divisione Alpina Julia with food and ammunitions. Furthermore, he tasked Ilari to send his bombers against those targets in Epirus that were requested by the army through the Comando Aeronautica Albania.

It was the end of any concept of an independent air campaign. The RA became more and more involved in ground support operations to prevent a Greek breakthrough. Small patrols of three or five bombers were sent daily to hammer from high-altitude small villages that hosted enemy troops



Regia Aeronautica

1. **Koritsa**
   - 393ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 42)/160° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 394ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 42)/160° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 25ª Squadriglia OA (Meridionali Ro 37)/72° Gruppo autonomo AO
2. **Berat**
   - 395ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat G 50)/160° – 154°Gruppo autonomo CT*
3. **Valona**
   - 51ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81)/39° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 69ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81)/39° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 202ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81)/40° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 203ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81)/40° Gruppo/38° Stormo BT
   - 42ª Squadriglia OA (Meridionali Ro 37)/72° Gruppo autonomo AO
   - 364ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 42)/150° Gruppo autonomo CT**
4. **Tirana**
   - 254ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 79)/105° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 255ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 79)/105° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 120ª Squadriglia OA (Meridionali Ro 37)/72° Gruppo autonomo AO
   - 354ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat G 50)/24° Gruppo autonomo CT**
   - 355ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat G 50)/24° Gruppo autonomo CT**
   - 361ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat G 50)/160° Gruppo autonomo CT*
   - 363ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 42)/150° Gruppo autonomo CT**
   - 252ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 79)/104° Gruppo autonomo BT**
   - 253ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 79)/104° Gruppo autonomo BT**
6. **Brindisi**
   - 190ª Squadriglia BM (CANT Z. 506)/86° Gruppo/35° Stormo BM
   - 191ª Squadriglia BM (CANT Z. 506)/86° Gruppo/35° Stormo BM
   - 230ª Squadriglia BM (CANT Z. 506)/95° Gruppo/35° Stormo BM
   - 231ª Squadriglia BM (CANT Z. 506)/95° Gruppo/35° Stormo BM
   - 210ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/50° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 211ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/ 50° Gruppo autonomo BT
   - 204ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/41° Gruppo autonomo BT**
   - 205ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/41° Gruppo autonomo BT**
   - 372ª Squadriglia autonoma CT (Macchi MC 200)**
7. **Lecce**
   - 220ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia Marchetti S 81 – Fiat BR 20)/55° Gruppo/37° Stormo BT
   - 221ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81 – Fiat BR 20)/55° Gruppo/37° Stormo BT
   - 276ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81 – Fiat BR 20)/116° Gruppo/ 37° Stormo BT
   - 277ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S 81 – Fiat BR 20)/116° Gruppo/ 37° Stormo BT
   - 236ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)/96° Gruppo autonomo BaT
   - 237ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)/96° Gruppo autonomo BaT
8. **Grottaglie**
   - 260ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/106° Gruppo/47° Stormo BT
   - 261ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/106° Gruppo/47° Stormo BT
   - 262ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/107° Gruppo/47° Stormo BT
   - 263ª Squadriglia BT (CANT Z. 1007)/107° Gruppo/47° Stormo BT
   - 150ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 32 – Fiat G 50)/2° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 151ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 32 – Fiat G 50)/2° Gruppo autonomo CT
   - 152ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat CR 32 – Fiat G 50)/2° Gruppo autonomo CT

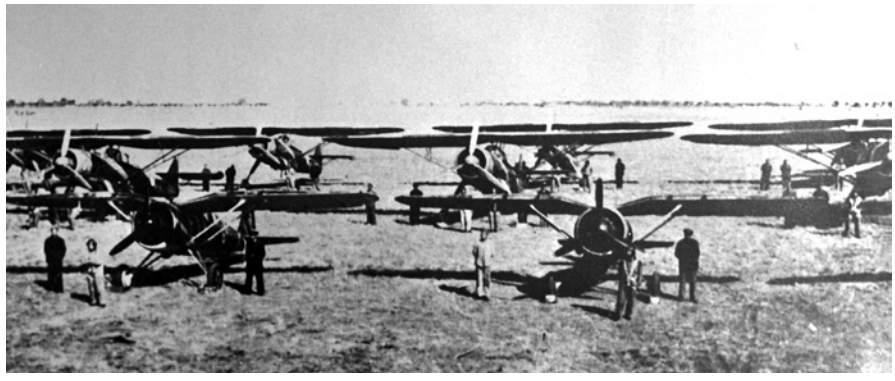
* *Following arrival of 24° Gruppo autonomo CT the 395ª Squadriglia CT formed, along with 361ª Squadriglia CT, formed the 154° Gruppo autonomo CT*

** *deployed between 1 – 11th November 1940*

Hellenika Vassiliki Aeroporia – Royal Air Force

1. **Larissa**
   - 23 Mira Dioxes (12 PZL P 24)
   - 32 Mira Vomvardismou (11/ 1 Blenheim IV)
   - 2 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (18 Breguet XIX along with 1 Mira)
2. **Salonika – Sedes**
   - 22 Mira Dioxes (12 PZL P 24)
3. **Eleusis (Athens)**
   - 24 Mira Dioxes (6/3 Bloch MB 151)
   - 30th Bomber / Fighter Squadron RAF (Blenheim I F – I B)[1]
   - 112th Fighter Squadron RAF (Gladiator)[6]
4. **Tatoi / Menidi (Athens)**
   - 13 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (9 Avro Anson)
   - 84th Bomber Squadron RAF (Blenheim IV)[3]
   - 70th Bomber Squadron RAF (Wellington I)[2]
   - 211th Bomber Squadron RAF (Blenheim IV)[5]
5. **Yannina**
   - 21 Mira Dioxes (3 PZL P 24)
   - 4 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (17 Potez 25)
   - 80th Fighter Squadron RAF (Gladiator)[4]
6. **Niamata (Larissa)**
   - 31 Mira Vomvardismou (8/3 Potez 63)
7. **Kalambaka – Vassiliki**
   - 21 Mira Dioxes (9 PZL P 24)
8. **Kouklaina – Veroia**
   - 33 Mira Vomvardismou (10/2 Fairey Battles)
   - 3 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (15 Henschel Hs 126)
9. **Kozani**
   - 1 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (18 Breguet XIX along with 2 Mira)
10. **Voltoudi – Volos**
    - 11 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (9 Fairey III F)
11. **Paloukia (Athens)**
    - 12 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (12 Dornier Do 22)

1 *Since 3 November*
2 *Since 4 November*
3 *Since 8 November*
4 *Since 14 – 18 November*
5 *Since 23 November*
6 *Since 2 December, then hands over the Gladiator to the 21 Mira at Eleusis*



Two PZL P.24 fighters stand in front of a group of Henschel Hs 126s, probably at Salonika, shortly before the war. The diverse origins of the Greek Air Force aircraft caused problems with supply of spare parts and ammunition. (Athens War Museum)

and supply depots, as well as choke points, such as road hubs or bridges, in the mountain ranges of Southern Albania and north-western Greece. The army was soon in desperate need of reinforcement and supplies of all kinds, and a massive airlift started from Puglia on 12 November and went on till mid-February, with the decisive contribution of the Luftwaffe.

The idea of attacking industrial and demographic targets was not discarded and kept emerging now and then, as a way not only to disrupt the enemy's fighting capability by attacking its source, but also to strike at his will to fight. Although not clearly stated, this concept came straight from Douhet's theory of spreading panic and disorganization amongst the population. On 15 November Pricolo issued the orders for 'Action M' that targeted Salonika with the double aim of striking at the harbour, with its vital warehouses, and the city, which hosted military headquarters, and the final goal of achieving both material and moral effects that were considered equally important.

Bad weather and the urgent requests of the army prevented 'Action M' from being carried out as intended, but Salonika was placed again on the target list, first on 24 November, when 'Action M' was again on the table, and then on 17 December, within the framework of a much more ambitious Operation *L*. This was conceived by the Air Staff to strike at the Greek logistics facilities, with a target list that included the harbours of Piraeus, Salonika and Volos, the railway bridges over the rivers Pinios, Bistrica, Vardar and Struma, and the railway hubs of Larissa and Plati. Once again bad weather and the needs of the army prevented the RA from putting it into execution. It was only in January that targets such as Salonika and Preveza were bombed again, as well as other targets away from the front line, but the foul winter weather was still a factor that jeopardized flight operations.

By early 1941, the objective of preventing a Greek breakthrough into Albania was achieved and by March 1941 the RA was ready to support the ill-fated Italian counteroffensive. Since early February the Italian raids had been more concentrated in time and space and therefore increasingly effective. In April the Aeronautica Albania and the 4ª Squadra Aerea supported the final advance of the army across the Albania–Greece border in the wake of the German breakthrough in Eastern Macedonia. At the same time, together with the 2ª Squadra Aerea, they acted offensively against Yugoslavia. The main issue here was co-ordinating operations with the Luftwaffe. The German High Command was concerned that Italian air strikes could destroy targets of German interest and in so doing hinder Wehrmacht operations. The RA was therefore allowed to act only in support of the Italian 2nd Army advance into Slovenia and Croatia and along the Dalmatian coast, with close-range strikes at tactical targets. It had also a free hand against the naval bases, to block the possible escape of the Yugoslav Navy, as well as against the main air base at Mostar and the airfields west of a demarcation line passing just east of Mostar. Only strafing attacks were allowed against Croatian airfields west of the line Zagreb–Sissak–Prijedor–Banja Luka, since these were possibly to be used by the Luftwaffe. The quick conclusion of the campaign avoided the need for any further planning.

German objectives

The first attack plan against Greece, Operation *Marita,* was restrained by geography and had one objective only: breaking through the Metaxas Line, mostly in the strategic area of the Rupel Pass. In a way, Operation *25*, the attack against Yugoslavia, eased the situation. Now the Germans could aim at the Florina Gap and, from there, straight into Greece, turning the Metaxas Line fortifications. The attack plan envisaged two main efforts: one from the north, with the AOK 2 (*Armee Ober Kommando* – 2nd Army) moving towards Zagreb and crossing the Drava River before turning south towards Belgrade; and one from the south, with Panzer Gruppe 1 striking towards Belgrade, which was to be taken with a three-pronged strike, XXXXI. Panzer Korps following up from Romania, and towards Skopje, before turning south to exploit the Florina Gap driving into Greece, which was also attacked from Bulgaria. Facing a great deal of tasks, the Luftwaffe relied on forward redeployment of its squadrons following the advance of the army, which required not bombing the airfields in order to have them immediately available, and allowing only strafing of aircraft on the ground. Anti-shipping operations in the Aegean Sea, along with the possible execution of the Hannibal plan, also required airfields close to the area.

Greek, Yugoslav and British objectives

The Greek IB defence plan was mostly based on the rigid defence against Albania and, at the same time, of the Metaxas Line facing Bulgaria. The situation changed soon after the Italian invasion, which stalled along the IB defensive line in Epirus, while it became clear that Bulgaria was not going to attack. This enabled the Greek commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Alexandros Papagos, to redeploy the Greek Army and launch a counter-attack which started on 15 November, taking the Italians by surprise and soon turning into a major offensive driving deep into the Albanian territory. By December 1940 the Greek Army had reached a line to the south of the major harbour of Valona, but due to fatigue and supply problems, as well as the stiffening of Italian resistance, the offensive soon stalled. Since then, Papagos' main concern was to deal with the Italian counteroffensive, which he successfully contained in March 1941, and then to create a unified defence of the Balkans by combining Greek, Commonwealth and Yugoslav forces. This was in his opinion the only possible solution to facing the coming German onslaught, and one cannot but agree with him.

The Yugoslav defence plan surely took the actual conditions of the country and of its army into account. Drafted in February 1941, revised and implemented on 31 March, the R-41 Plan almost exclusively focused on the defence of its borders to which some 80 per cent of

A Potez 63, still in the Armée de l'Air colours before its delivery to Greece. A total of 24 of these aircraft were purchased, France delivering only 11 in 1940 because of the need to maintain its own air force strength facing the German offensive.(Athens War Museum)

The commander of *Barbarity* force, which was the RAF expeditionary force in Greece: Air Commodore J.H. D'Albiac portrayed here sitting at his desk in the headquarters at the Hotel Grande Bretagne in Athens. D'Albiac was promoted acting Air Vice Marshal on 15 November 1940.(IWM)

the army was allotted. Most of the remaining part was deployed against Albania with the aim of carrying out a combined offensive along with Greece to drive the Italians out of that country, notwithstanding the detail that such an offensive would come at a time when the exhausted Greek Army was no longer capable of offensive actions and the Italian Army in Albania was at its peak. The JKRV, without any kind of centralized command, and having deployed most of its air units to auxiliary airfields to save them from counter-air strikes, had practically relinquished any offensive capability it may have had. Had a proper air-to-ground and ground-to-air communication system existed, the JKRV might have been able at least to support the army, if not to rely on some sort of air warning system. In reality, communications with the auxiliary airfields were basically non-existent, which left the JKRV with the only option of flying combat air patrols in search of the enemy or to defend its own bases. It ought to be noted that some bombing missions were actually flown against targets in Austria and Bulgaria, even though it is not clear whether these were part of a plan.

In 1940 the Royal Hellenic Air Force (EVA) was facing two simple tasks: to defend the country and to provide air-to-ground support to the Greek Army, which would raise bitter controversy with the RAF as soon as the *Barbarity* force was deployed in the country. To the request to support the Greek Army in the struggle towards Valona and Tepeleni, D'Albiac replied that his bomber squadrons would be best employed by hitting 'strategic' targets, such as the Albanian harbours and logistics facilities. This statement was clearly a derivative of the RAF doctrine that in 1940, notwithstanding the lessons of the Battle of France, disregarded the tactical use of air power in support of ground forces, and considered only targets at the operational or strategic level. D'Albiac was openly opposed not only by the Greek General Staff, but also by the British Military Attaché in Athens but, putting to one side any doctrinal legacy, his decision was a sound one, if one considers the situation his force was facing. Ground-to-air communications were practically absent, and the RAF personnel had neither experience nor the training required to co-operate with any army, let alone the Greek Army. Furthermore, *Barbarity* squadrons were at the time mostly based in the Athens area, which meant the RAF bombers would have had to have operated without fighter cover. The idea of hitting the Italian supply bases at a time when they were congested made sense and created fewer operational problems. This decision was openly criticized, above all by the King of Greece, but D'Albiac carried on and, having secured control of air operations, started a bombing campaign using the Blenheims in daylight and the Wellingtons at night.

Early in 1941, the RAF, also taking advantage of the lull in operations imposed by the weather, started reorganizing following the arrival of new units and adopted a new approach, trying to support the last Greek offensive towards Valona by striking at targets close to the front, mainly depots, headquarters and motor pools, that required no fire co-ordination with the troops on ground. Then, in April 1941, the *Barbarity* force was called to support both Greek and British ground forces, a task the RAF was not ready for, while at the same time providing air cover to the ports of disembarkation of the Commonwealth troops. Given the poor conditions of the remnants of the EVA, and the new crisis the RAF had to face in North Africa, this indeed was too much.

THE CAMPAIGN

The Italo-Greek War

Savoia-Marchetti S.79 three-engine bombers of the 252ª Squadriglia (104° Gruppo, 46° Stormo BT) over the snow-capped mountains of Western Greece and Southern Albania. The aircraft are approaching their target as suggested by the extended 'legs' of the bombardier position, in the 'gondola' below the fuselage.(AC)

What happened at the outbreak of the Italo-Greek conflict on 28 October set the pattern for the coming months. Bad weather with the incumbent presence of stormy clouds at low altitude prevented the bombers from Albania from carrying out the missions intended to pave the way for the Italian Army. Early in the afternoon three patrols of S.81s from the 38° Stormo bombed targets in Epirus, such as the Dolian–Kalpaki road, defensive positions on the eastern bank of the river Kalamas and the Kalpaki road junction. Overall, eight aircraft dropped 140 50kg bombs from an altitude below the cloud ceiling at 2,500m, scoring many near misses and without being able to document the results since the cameras did not work as expected, due to both technical problems and inadequate aircrew training. Meanwhile the fighter squadrons were carrying out fighter sweeps along the border, in and out of the clouds. In the morning, three CR.42s from the 393ª Squadriglia (160° Gruppo) scrambled from Drenovë and soon after, one of the three pilots, Capitano Mario Gaetano Carancini, scored the first air victory of the campaign. He heavily damaged a twin-seater Henschel Hs 126 from 3 Mira that crash-landed in Greek-controlled territory.

Italian bombers from Puglia had the task of striking at air and naval bases, as well as at choke points of the communication network. In the late morning of 28 October, 13 CANT Z.506B seaplanes from the 35° Stormo bombed the railway bridge across the Corinth Canal from an altitude of 4,000m, hitting the area around its northern end. Meanwhile, ten CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo bombed the Tatoi airfield, near Athens, from the same altitude, causing some damage to the runway and to the buildings, and ten S.81s from the 55° Gruppo and nine BR.20s from the 116° Gruppo bombed the harbour and the city of Patras. The only effective response came from the anti-aircraft artillery and one S.81 landed near Otranto, on the way to its base at Lecce, with a punctured fuel tank. Patras was bombed again in the afternoon by five S.81s from the 55° Gruppo, while the harbour of Preveza was the target of five BR.20s from the 116°. Furthermore, two seaplanes of 35° Stormo carried out reconnaissance sorties along the coast of Western Greece and over the Ionian Islands, starting what should have become a daily routine.

ORDER OF BATTLE

ITALO-GREEK WAR, 28 October 1940
Regia Aeronautica
Comando Aeronautica Albania (Tirana) (*Albania Air Command*)
38° Stormo BT
39° Gruppo (Valona)
51ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
69ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
40° Gruppo (Valona)
202ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
203ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)

46° Stormo BT (Tirana)
104° Gruppo [from 3 November]
252ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
253ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
105° Gruppo
254ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
255ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)

160° Gruppo Autonomo CT (Koritza) (*independent Gruppo*)
393ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.32)
394ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.42)
363ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.42), (formed on 2 November)
395ª Squadriglia CT (Fiat G.50), at Berat, (formed on 5 November, attached to 154°Gruppo Autonomo CT)

150° Gruppo autonomo CT (Valona), (formed on 1 November)
363ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.42), (until 2 November)
364ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.42)
365ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT CR.42)

24° Gruppo Autonomo CT (Tirana), (formed on 2 November)
354ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT G.50)
355ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT G.50)

154° Gruppo Autonomo CT (Berat), (formed on 5 November)
361ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT G.50) (previously part of 24° Gruppo Autonomo CT)
395ª Squadriglia CT (FIAT G.50) (previously part of 160°Gruppo autonomo CT)

72° Gruppo Autonomo OA
25ª Squadriglia OA (IMAM Ro.37bis), Koritza
42ª Squadriglia OA (IMAM Ro.37bis), Argirocastro (formed on 2 November)
120ª Squadriglia OA (IMAM Ro.37bis), Argirocastro

Sezione Autonoma Volo (S.79, S.81, Ca.308), Tirana
IV Zona Aerea Territoriale (Bari)
35° Stormo BM (Brindisi)
86° Gruppo
190ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.506B)
191ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.506B)
95° Gruppo
230ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.506B)
231ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.506B)

37° Stormo BT (Lecce)
55° Gruppo
220ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
221ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
116° Gruppo
276ª Squadriglia (FIAT BR.20)
277ª Squadriglia (FIAT BR.20)

47° Stormo BT (Grottaglie)
106° Gruppo BT
260ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)
261ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)
107° Gruppo
262ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)
263ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)

50° Gruppo BT (Brindisi) [from 16° Stormo]
210ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)
211ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)

96° Gruppo Autonomo BaT (Lecce)
236ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)
237ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)

2° Gruppo Autonomo CT (Grottaglie)
150ª Squadriglia (FIAT G.50)
151ª Squadriglia (FIAT G.50)

152ª Squadriglia (FIAT G.50), Bari

41° Gruppo BT, from 12° Stormo (Brindisi), (formed on 11 November)
204ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)
205ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.1007bis)

372ª Squadriglia CT (Macchi C.200), Brindisi, (formed on 4 November)

Comando Aeronautica dell'Egeo (Rhodes)
161ª Squadriglia Autonoma CM (IMAM Ro.44), Leros
162ª Squadriglia Autonoma CT (FIAT CR.42), Rhodes Maritza
163ª Squadriglia Autonoma CT (FIAT CR.42), Rhodes Gadurrà

39° Stormo BT
56° Gruppo (Rhodes Maritza)
222ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
223ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
92° Gruppo (Rhodes Gadurrà)
200ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
201ª Squadriglia BT (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)

34° Gruppo Autonomo BT (Rhodes Gadurrà)
67ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
68ª Squadriglia (Savoia-Marchetti S.79)

84° Gruppo RM (Leros)
147ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.501)
185ª Squadriglia (CANT Z.501)

Sezione Soccorso (CANT Z.506), Rhodes Mandracchio (air rescue flight)
Royal Hellenic Air Force
21 Mira Dioxes (PZL P.24) [Kalambaka]
22 Mira Dioxes (PZL P.24) [Salonika]
23 Mira Dioxes (PZL P.24) [Larissa]
24 Mira Dioxes (Bloch MB 151) [Eleusi]

31 Mira Vomvardismou (Potez 63) [Niamata]
32 Mira Vomvardismou (Blenheim Mk IV) [Larissa]
33 Mira Vomvardismou (Fairey Battle Mk I) [Kouklaina]

1 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (Breguet XIX) (air ground co-operation squadron)
2 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (Breguet XIX)
3 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (Henschel Hs 126)
4 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (Potez 25)

11 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (Fairey III F) (air sea co-operation squadron)
12 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (Dornier Do 22)
13 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (Avro Anson)

Royal Air Force (*Barbarity*), deploying from 5 November
No.30 Bomber/Fighter Squadron (Blenheim Mk I, Mk IF)
No.84 Bomber Squadron (Blenheim Mk I)
No.211 Bomber Squadron (Blenheim Mk I)
No.70 Bomber Squadron (Vickers Wellington Mk Ic)
No.80 Fighter Squadron (Gloster Gladiator)
No.112 Fighter Squadron (Gloster Gladiator)

A short-lived independent air campaign

For the Regia Aeronautica this was supposed to be the intended pattern of air operations but the weather prevented it from being feasible and soon the situation on the ground would impose other priorities. For the time being, notwithstanding the difficult weather, tactical reconnaissance aircraft from both sides were trying to clarify what was happening on the ground. In this context, just past midday on 30 October, Tenente Colonnello (Wing Commander) Fernando Zanni (160° Gruppo) led five CR.42s from the 393ª Squadriglia and two CR.32s from the 394ª in an offensive patrol towards the airfields of Kastoria and Florina. Soon after they crossed the front line, the patrol met two Hs 126s from 3 Mira that were quickly disposed of by the two leading FIAT fighters. Sergeant Walter Ratticchieri shot down the first, with both aircrews being killed (Anthyposminagos (Pilot Officer) Lazaros Papamichail and Sminias (Sergeant) Constantinos Yemenitzis), while Zanni hit the second to crash-land near the village of Vassiliada, killing the observer, Anthyposminagos Evanghelos Giannaris. The first Italian losses came on the evening of 31 October, when two CR.32s from the 394ª Squadriglia scrambled from Koritza. Due to a thunderstorm, they could not return to base before running out of fuel. Both pilots bailed out safely, but Tenente (Flying Officer) Dino Ciarlo landed in Greek territory to become the first prisoner of war of the RA.

With the Italian Army still trudging along towards Kalpaki and Yannina, there was no reason to modify the target list. Therefore, on 1 November, when the weather improved,

Savoia-Marchetti S.81 bombers with a G.50 fighter flying alongside. The S.81 was present in Albania with the two *gruppi* (groups) of the 38° Stormo BT and with the Sezione Autonoma di Volo. During the campaign it was switched to night bombing missions and airdrop duties in favour of the army, to speed up the delivery of supplies. (AC)

bombers from Puglia were sent again to strike at targets that were unrelated to ground operations. Salonika, whose port and factories were considered of the utmost importance, was bombed in the morning by ten S.79s from the 105° Gruppo, led by Tenente Colonnello Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister and the son-in-law of Mussolini. Several 22 Mira PZL fighters took off from Sedes to engage the intruders but to no avail, and the same happened in the afternoon, when ten CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo bombed the city again. All bombers returned safely to Tirana and Grottaglie, and all escorting fighters from the 160° Gruppo returned to Koritza as well. The gunners of the S.79 and the pilot of the CR.42 claimed a pair of Greek fighters but all PZLs landed at Sedes without any relevant damage. Their pilots also put forward an erroneous claim and were credited with a non-existent kill against the afternoon raiders.

On the same day, ten CANT Z.1007bis from the 107° Gruppo attacked the Salamina naval base; nine from the 50° Gruppo bombed Larissa aiming at the railway station; three CANT Z.506Bs tried again to hit the railway bridge over the Corinth Canal; and eight patrols of S.81s from the 55° Gruppo, which recorded 26 sorties overall, battered several targets on the island of Corfu. At the end of the day, IV ZAT filed 107 sorties with 53,650kg of bombs dropped without any loss. The fighters of the 2° Gruppo CT had flown 40 of these sorties to patrol the sky over Bari, Brindisi and Lecce.

Corfu was the planned objective of an amphibious operation and as such was targeted by the 38° Stormo which, on the afternoon of All Saints' Day (1 November), sent four patrols of S.81s, numbering 17 aircraft in total, to strike at several road junctions as well as at the old forts defending the main city. In the morning, one patrol of three S.81s and one of four had bombed the area of Metsovo, a crucial road switch between Western Macedonia and Epirus. One bomber of the first patrol suffered damages in a brief encounter with two PZLs from 21 Mira and had to land on the Kelcirë–Balaban road, east of Tepeleni. The S.81 was repaired on the spot and was serviceable again by the end of the day. On their side the Italian gunners claimed a Greek fighter shot down while none actually was. Early in the morning, three CR.32s from the 394ª Squadriglia (160° Gruppo), led by Tenente Mario Frascadore, had disposed of two Breguet XIXs from 2 Mira that were surveying the area between Bilishti and Pozigrad. In the evening, three Blenheim Mk IVs from 32 Mira carried out the first offensive operation of the EVA, bombing the airfields at Drenovë and Koritza. Drenovë suffered very little damage, but at Koritza the runway was hit and so were some buildings, killing 15 airmen and wounding 20. One CR.42 and one CR.32 from the 160° Gruppo suffered damages on landing on the cratered airfield. Soon after, in the falling night, three Potez 63s from 31 Mira took off from an airfield near Larissa to strike at the advanced echelon of Divisione Centauro on the road to Kalpaki, aiming at the vanishing headlights of the Italian vehicles. Like their enemies, most Greek pilots had very little training in night operations and returning to base was a true feat. One Potez, almost out of fuel, diverted to Tatoi and on landing crashed against an Avro Tutor (training aircraft) parked along the runway.

Nothing changed on 2 November. In the morning, eight of 105° Gruppo's S.79s and eight of 38° Stormo's S.81s from Tirana and Valona were tasked with striking at the defensive positions blocking the road to Kalpaki as well as at the staging area and road choke point on the Smerdeke Pass. Meanwhile ten of 55° Gruppo's S.81s bombed Corfu again, nine of

FAR LEFT
Squadron Leader J.R. Gordon-Finlayson, commander of RAF No.211 Squadron, photographed along with his wireless operator in a Blenheim Mk I at Menidi/Tatoi after returning from Corfu where the aircraft force-landed on 24 November 1940, after being damaged by ground fire and by a G.50 from the 24° Gruppo during a raid on Valona. The crew returned by fishing boat, carrying wine and gifts given by their Greek hosts. (IWM)

LEFT
The wireless operator/air-gunner of this Blenheim Mk I based at Menidi/Tatoi is posing for a photograph suggesting how lethal the defences of the aircraft were. In fact, the RAF Blenheim suffered heavily from Italian fighters during their daylight missions. (IWM)

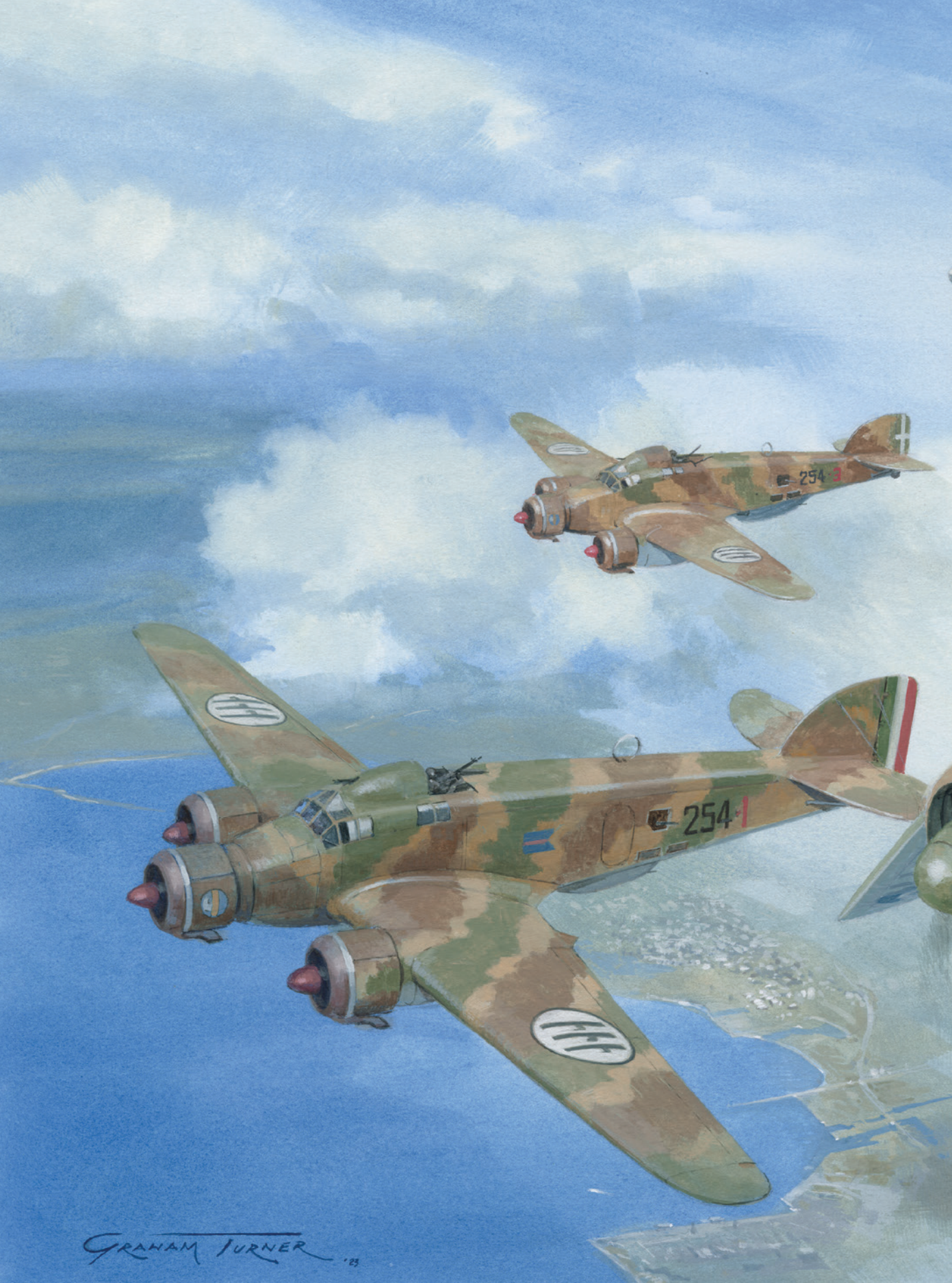
35° Stormo's CANT Z.506Bs and ten of 116° Gruppo's BR.20s hammered the city and the harbour of Patras, nine of 107° Gruppo's CANT Z.1007bis attacked Larissa and ten from 106° Gruppo over Yannina. Then the Picchiatelli entered the fray, with five Ju 87s from the 96° Gruppo BaT taking off from Lecce to attack the already-battered city of Corfu and five more striking at Yannina. It was the debut of the dive-bombers in the campaign, but the Regia Aeronautica did not have enough of them and had to cope also with the needs of the Mediterranean and the North African theatres. At the same time some three-aircraft patrols from the 150° and the 160° Gruppi of Comando Aeronautica Albania carried out strafing missions on the enemy rear and one patrol targeted a still-empty landing strip near Paramythia.

Before midday five of 40° Gruppo's S.81s from Valona repeated the bombing of Yannina. The city was well defended by anti-aircraft batteries that shot down one bomber, and three PZL fighters from 21 Mira engaged the remaining four. The responding fire hit one Greek fighter, which crashed, killing the pilot, and another was shot down by the escorting five CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo. At the end, while the Italians claimed three victories and the Greeks credited four bombers to 21 Mira, the EVA lost two PZLs and the RA the one S.81 shot down by ground fire with three more damaged. This was just one of the many cases of overclaiming of the campaign, and another was about to happen.

In late morning ten of 50° Gruppo's CANT Z.1007bis took off from Brindisi setting course for Salonika. Two bombers had to abort the mission due to engine troubles, the others dropped their bombs on target from an altitude of 4,700m but anti-aircraft fire damaged one CANT Z.1007bis and killed its gunner. Soon after, four PZLs from 22 Mira engaged the

The Italian bombing of Salonika, 1 November 1940

On 27 October 1940, the Chief of Air Staff of the Regia Aeronautica, Generale di Squadra Aerea Francesco Pricolo, assigned the task of attacking the harbour and the airport of Salonika to the 105° Gruppo BT (46° Stormo BT), based at Tirana. Bad weather prevented this order from being executed until 1 November, when ten Savoia-Marchetti S.79s of the 105° Gruppo took off at 0845hrs under the command of Tenente Colonnello Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's Foreign Minister and son-in-law. The bombers were escorted by five CR.42s of the 393ª Squadriglia CT (160° Gruppo) from Koritza, led by Maggiore Angelo Mastragostino. The 105° Gruppo formation reached Salonika without difficulty and at 1008hrs, in spite of furious anti-aircraft fire, dropped 6,400kg of bombs on the docks. Soon after it was engaged by seven PZL P.24s from 22 Mira which had just scrambled from the nearby Sedes airfield. In the ensuing mêlée, the Italians claimed two PZLs shot down, one each for the fighters and the bombers, and two probables, but these Greek losses cannot be confirmed. All five S.79s were back at Tirana at 1130hrs, four of them slightly damaged. Salonika was bombed again in the afternoon by ten CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo BT (47° Stormo) coming from Grottaglie and led by the 47° Stormo commanding officer, Colonnello Scipione Tadè. At 1430hrs, they dropped 8,500kg of bombs from 5,000m on the harbour district. Three aircraft were slightly damaged by ground fire and the bombers repelled the attacks of a couple of PZLs. All ten CANT Z.1007bis returned to base by 1630hrs. In these two raids on Salonika, 35 civilians were killed.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Two groups of aircraft photographed at the Tatoi airfield, Athens. On the right the PZL P.24s which equipped the 21, 22 and 23 Mira Dioxes (fighter squadron), on the left the Blenheim Mk IVs equipping the 32 Mira Vomvardismou (bomber squadron).(Athens War Museum)

bombers. Hiposminagos (*Flying Officer*) Marinos Mitralexis fixed one of the bombers in his gunsight and fired several long bursts before attacking another, but when he closed the range for what he hoped would be the kill, he found himself out of ammunition. Mitralexis had made the mistake of firing too soon with overlong bursts, but instead of breaking away, he pressed on and with the nose of his PZL rammed the CANT Z's tail, slicing off part of the rudder and sending the bomber into a spin. The Italian first pilot, Sottotenente Beniamino Pasqualotto, had been killed by Mitralexis' first burst; the other four crew members succeeded in bailing out and with the help of some peasants were captured by the same Mitralexis, who had landed nearby with his heavily damaged fighter. A second bomber was damaged and forced to crash-land near Naoussa, west of Salonika, where the five airmen were also captured. Greek reports doubled the number of the destroyed bombers but six out of eight returned safely to Brindisi, while the Italian gunners claimed the destruction of a fighter and indeed the pilot of one PZL was wounded and forced to land in the countryside.

In the afternoon Salonika was the target assigned to ten S.79s from the 105° Gruppo. After taking off from Tirana, the bombers, led by Maggiore (Squadron Leader) Remo Cadringher and accompanied by 12 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo, arrived over the city and dropped their bombs, aiming at the railway station. Eight PZLs from 22 Mira tried to engage the S.79s and clashed with the escorting CR.42s that claimed four victories plus one probable. Only one Greek fighter was actually lost and the pilot bailed out to safety. Anti-aircraft artillery damaged six bombers and one, repeatedly hit by the fighters, barely made it to Devoli with only one engine operating and with the gunner fatally wounded. At the end of the day, Mussolini, who was visiting IV ZAT, cancelled the Corfu amphibious operation due to the weather conditions at sea. On his part, Ilari ordered suspending the combat air patrols over Puglia, since they were too exhausting for both men and aircraft, and operating instead an alarm-based system, with the support of the army air defence organization and its observation posts.

A Blenheim Mk IV of 32 Mira during a pause at the Trikkala airfield, October 1940. The camouflage was the same as the RAF bombers, the Greek airforce simply adding the national white and azure blue roundel and the number denoting the individual aircraft. (Athens War Museum)

In early morning, one Breguet XIX from 2 Mira had located the leading elements of the Divisione Alpina Julia between Samarinas and Distraton on the way to the Metsovo Pass. This information cleared the 'fog of war' and allowed Papagos to plan and organize the counteroffensive that in a few days would turn the tables. Then, in the afternoon, Greek

bombers were to strike at the advanced Italian airfields in a deliberate counter-air effort. Three Blenheims from 32 Mira took off from Trikkala and bombed Drenovë, causing some damage to the facilities, killing one airman and wounding four more. Three more Blenheims from the same Mira attacked Koritza, their bombs hitting the runway and destroying one of the two CR.42s that were taking off to meet them. An anti-aircraft battery nearby claimed one of the bombers as a probable victory and indeed one Blenheim could not make it back to Trikkala and had to crash-land in Greek-held territory.

On the following day, the initial orders again sent the bombers from Puglia against targets deep in Greece, in no direct relationship to current ground operations, but weather caused these missions to be postponed to the afternoon. Eight aircraft from the 106° Gruppo bombed the ridge north-east of Yannina from a height of 5,300m, six Ju 87s from the 96° Gruppo attacked the forts of Corfu and four seaplanes from the 95° Gruppo bombed Patras. Furthermore, nine CANT Z.1007bis from the 107° Gruppo raided Salonika again, aiming at the harbour and the railway station from 5,900m. This altitude did not provide the expected degree of safety since the artillery shot down one aircraft, while the bombers quite easily avoided two PZLs from 22 Mira. The RA was called upon also to support the army in Western Macedonia, where Ranza's bombers had the task of helping XXVI Corps to contain the increasing enemy pressure, and to assist the Divisione Julia still advancing towards Metsovo. Small patrols of no more than two or three S.79s from 46° Stormo or two or three S.81s from 38° Stormo repeatedly hammered communication lines and staging areas and also battered the enemy's entrenched positions, while similarly small patrols of fighters from the Albanian airfields provided indirect escort. The ruinous state of the muddy mountain roads and mule tracks caused enormous difficulties in supplying front-line troops and this task too was to fall increasingly on the air force. On 2 November, the first of many airdrops of food and ammunition was attempted by two S.81s of the Sezione Autonoma di Volo from Valona in favour of the Divisione Julia on Mount Smolika, but the whereabouts of the troops was not identified and the operation was cancelled.

The campaign was not going according to plan and, even if Pricolo was not willing to cancel independent operations against targets in the far rear, the RA was to be more and more involved in near interdiction operations as well as in some form of close air support, despite not being trained and equipped for it. Starting on 4 November even the IV ZAT

One of the two waist Breda-SAFAT 7.7mm machine guns of the CANT Z.1007bis. The aircraft had two 12.7mm machine guns, one in the dorsal turret and one firing through a port under the fuselage covering the rear, and two 7.7mm machine guns, one on each side.(AC)

was to operate in this way, both in the Koritza sector and in Epirus, where Ilari's bombers were to support XXV Corps in pressing on towards Kalpaki and across the Kalamas River. Nevertheless, eight CANT Z.1007bis from the 50° Gruppo again attacked a non-tactical target, taking off from Brindisi to bomb the harbour and the railway station of Volos. The high-altitude raiders fended off the attacks of five PZLs that damaged one of the bombers, killing one aircrew. The Greek pilots erroneously claimed three kills and the Italian gunners two. Two CR.42s from the 365ª Squadriglia (150° Gruppo) that took off from Valona to patrol the area of Mount Smolika instead scored two confirmed victories against two Breguet XIXs, out of a patrol of three from 2 Mira that was flying in loose formation at low altitude in search of targets. During the morning three S.81s attempted to airdrop supplies in the same area, being forced back by the awful weather, and one of them went missing with its crew.

In support of the army

On the evening of 4 November, Pricolo ordered Ranza to use his bombers only to support both the hard-pressed troops in Western Macedonia and the Divisione Alpina Julia, still advancing towards the Metsovo Pass. Ranza was also to point out the targets that Ilari's bombers were to attack in support of the army, based on the requests put forward daily by the Comando Superiore Truppe Albania. The range of the CANT Z.1007bis meant that the 50° Gruppo from Brindisi and the 47° Stormo from Grottaglie could easily operate over the inland region of the Prespa Lakes and Western Macedonia. The BR.20s and the S.81s from the 37° Stormo and the seaplanes of the 35° Stormo were instead to operate mainly over the coastal region, where XXV Corps was still attacking towards Kalpaki and across the Kalamas. The Ju 87s of 96° Gruppo could operate in both regions according to the current situation.

While the Undersecretary for War, Generale di Corpo d'Armata (*Lieutenant General*) Ubaldo Soddu, replaced Visconti Prasca to give a new momentum to the offensive, these orders marked the end of the intended independent air campaign. The bombing of Piraeus carried out on the morning of 5 November by nine CANT Z.1007bis from the 107° Gruppo that quite easily fended off the attacks of two Gloster Gladiators, and the bombing of Volos by six aircraft from the 50° Gruppo and of Patras by six seaplanes of the 35° Stormo on 6 November, were its last gasps. In the coming weeks, when the weather allowed flying operations and the clouds were scattered enough to permit the bombers to have their targets in sight at medium and high altitude, small patrols of two or three aircraft, or even single aircraft, were regularly sent against the designated targets, following instructions that were given to the crews just before take-off. There was no real advance planning and all missions were flown according to a schedule that was defined from day to day, based on the requests coming in every

Four S.79s of the 253ª Squadriglia (104° Gruppo, 46° Stormo BT) displaying different camouflage patterns. This *gruppo* remained in Albania for most of the campaign. On 3 April 1941, it was moved to Foggia, in Puglia, and transferred to the 4ª Squadra Aerea. (AC)

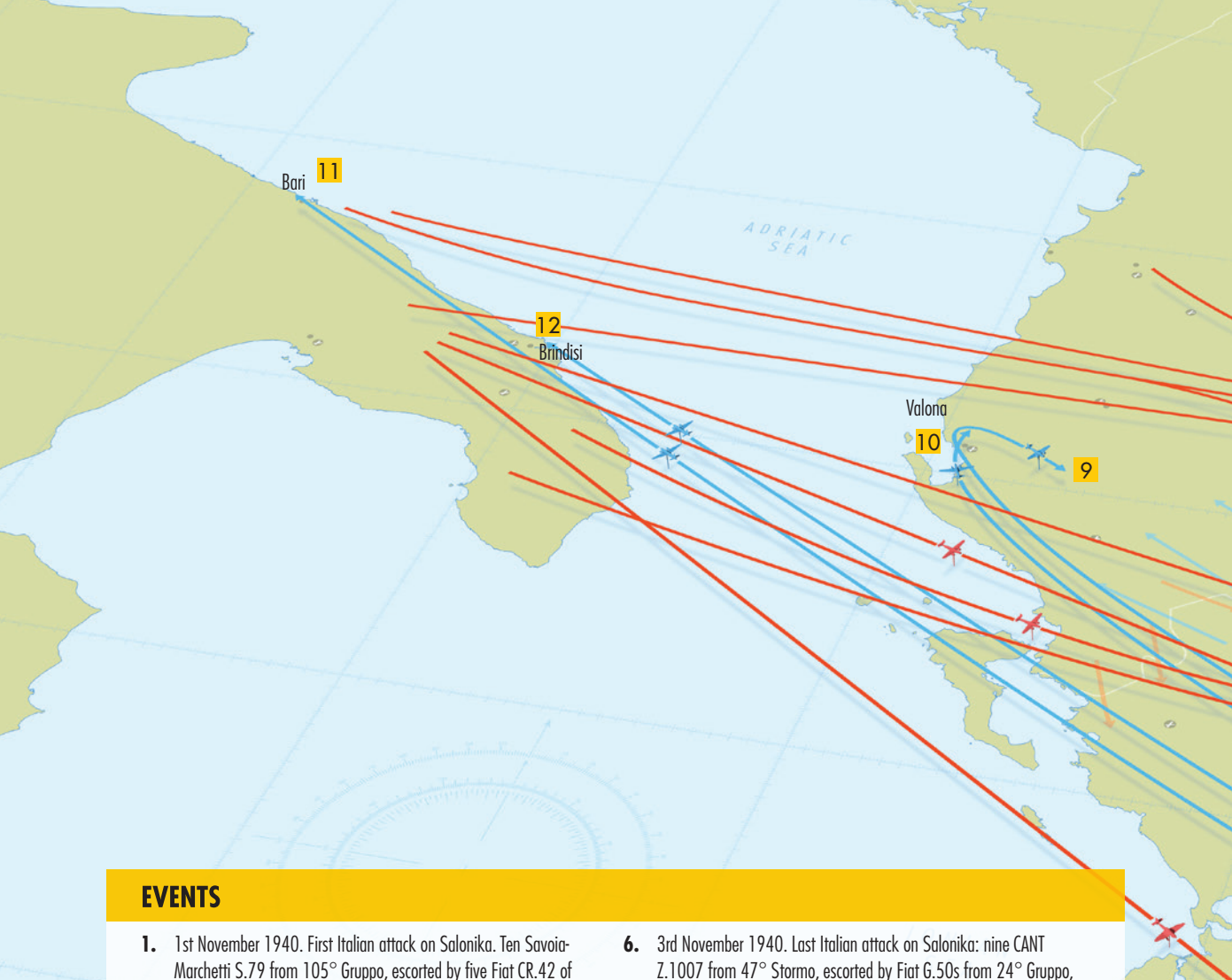
evening from Tirana through Ranza's staff. Target intelligence was poor or even non-existent, based as it was on irregularly updated photographs, and to make things worse, regular reconnaissance was limited to the front line and its immediate rear, where air observation aircraft were flying both photographic and visual reconnaissance missions tasked by the army headquarters. The only reconnaissance missions carried out regularly at operational level were those flown daily by the 35° Stormo's CANT Z.506Bs to monitor the harbours and coastal waters of Western Greece.

A CANT Z.1007bis of the 210ª Squadriglia (50° Gruppo BT) over the mountainous terrain of Southern Albania. Besides the distinctive camouflage scheme, it is fairly easily identified from the peculiar Caproni-Lanciani Delta dorsal turret with its IF Scotti 12.7mm machine gun. The turret was fully mechanical and the machine gun was compensated for with a counterweight to ease its manoeuvre on the vertical plane. (AC)

The effectiveness of the medium-altitude attacks against tactical targets was not commensurate with the effort they required, in spite of the many bombs dropped on a routine basis. Medium bombers were not the right answer to the problem. They could not penetrate at low altitude in the deep, narrow valleys of the Albanian-Greek mountainous border region and had to drop their load from an altitude above the highest peaks, against small and elusive targets that in autumn and winter were very often covered by fog and masked by low cloud. Due to these limitations, their targets were usually small hamlets that were able to accommodate troops as well as act as supplies and ammunition advance depots; road junctions and bridges; and some small towns that hosted main depots and headquarters. Bomber squadrons had not trained for air-to-ground co-operation and they did not have the equipment or the type of armament needed for close air support or for more-effective near battlefield interdiction operations. Aerial observation aircraft were more suited to this kind of task, but they were lacking in fire power, due to their limited armament, and little more could be done by the fighter patrols sent now and then on strafing missions. The most effective weapon was undoubtedly the Ju 87, but it was available in small numbers. Furthermore, the 96° Gruppo's Picchiatelli were stationed in Lecce, across the sea, quite far from the battle zone, and were not supported by any kind of forward air control due to the absence of an effective ground-to-air communication system that would allow ground observers to direct their attacks. None of this existed and all attacks were against pre-planned or opportunity targets.

In spite of these shortcomings, the RA was able to provide some relief to the troops and ease the pressure they were increasingly suffering both in Western Macedonia and in the Pindus Mountains, where the Divisione Julia had to disentangle itself from the deep bulge its own advance had created. Aircraft were also supporting the alpine division with airdrops, the first successful one being carried out on 5 November near Bryatza by two pairs of S.81s. The relevance of these efforts is in some ways underlined by the counter-air operations carried out on the same day by two patrols of Greek bombers against the advanced airfields at Drenovë and Argirocastro, with more of such strikes to come in the future. Even if they never achieved decisive results, it was not possible to ignore the threat and a combat air patrol system was established to cover Tirana, Valona, Berat, Elbasan, Scutari and Durazzo, placing a heavy burden on the fighter squadrons. There were now four of them in Albania, since the G.50-equipped 154° Gruppo CT was activated at Berat on 5 November.

Meanwhile, RAF No.30 Squadron, coming from Egypt with its Bristol Blenheim Mk I and Mk IF, landed at Eleusis, near Athens. This had been preceded by the arrival, on 6 November, of Air Vice Marshal John Henry D'Albiac to take up command of the RAF expeditionary force. The unit was soon reinforced by two more Bristol Blenheim bomber squadrons (No.84 and No.211) and by one Gloster Gladiator fighter squadron (No.80). On 6 November, three bombers from No.30 Squadron attacked the airfield and the harbour of Valona, causing some



EVENTS

1. 1st November 1940. First Italian attack on Salonika. Ten Savoia-Marchetti S.79 from 105° Gruppo, escorted by five Fiat CR.42 of 160° Gruppo, on a bombing run on Salonika are intercepted by seven PZL 24 of 22 Mira over the city. One PZL 24 is reported lost, the Italian attack achieving little results.

2. 1st November 1940. Ten CANT Z.1007 from 47° Stormo escorted by four Fiat CR.42 from 160° Gruppo are on a bombing run on Salonika and Larissa. They are engaged by 7 PZL 24 of 21 and 24 Mira, which damages one CANT Z.1007.

3. 2nd November 1940. IV Zona Aerea Territoriale gets involved: five Junkers Ju 87 from 96° Gruppo BaT attack Yoannina from Italy.

4. 2nd November 1940. Italian mass air attacks: ten CANT Z.1007 from 47° Stormo, escorted by Fiat CR.42 from 365ª Squadriglia, attack Yoannina and are intercepted by three PZL 24 from 21 Mira, which loses one. Nine CANT Z.1007 from 47° Stormo attack Larissa. One PZL 24 from 21 Mira intercepts them but is shot down. Ten Fiat BR.20 from 37° Stormo attack Patras, no losses recorded.

5. 2nd November 1940. Ten CANT Z.1007 from 50° Gruppo, escorted by Fiat CR.42 from 363ª Squadriglia, on a bomb run on Salonika are forced to jettison early when attacked by PZL 24 from 22 Mira. Three CANT Z.1007s are shot down, one PZL 24 is damaged.

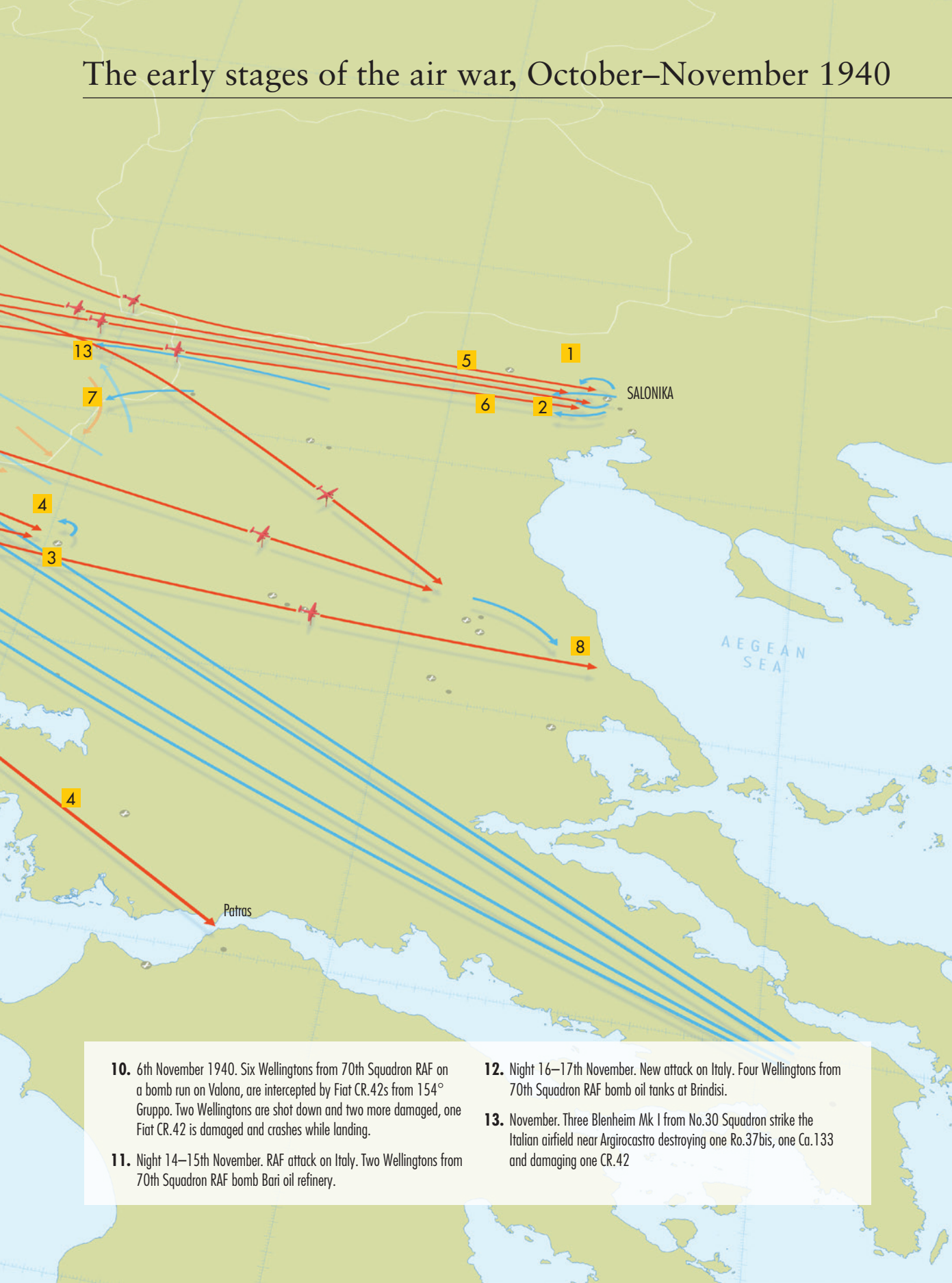
6. 3rd November 1940. Last Italian attack on Salonika: nine CANT Z.1007 from 47° Stormo, escorted by Fiat G.50s from 24° Gruppo, are intercepted by the PZL 24s from 22 Mira. One PZL 24 is lost and two are damaged, one CANT Z.1007 and one Fiat G.50 are lost.

7. 2nd November 1940. The RHAF strikes back: three Blenheim IV from 32 Mira attack Koritza airfield claiming one Fiat CR.42 destroyed, and inflicting heavy damage. One Breguet XIX from 2 Mira spots, on the Pindus, the Italian 'Julia' Mountain division advancing, which enables a prompt response on the ground.

8. 4th November 1940. Activity beyond the frontline: eight CANT Z.1007 from 50° Gruppo attack Volos and are intercepted by PZL 24s from 21 and 23 Mira, each claiming one CANT Z.1007 shot down (a third are also lost but not attributed). Two Fiat CR.42 from 365ª Squadriglia intercept two Breguet XIX from 2 Mira over Distraton, shooting one down.

9. 5th November 1940. Three Blenheim I B of 30th Squadron RAF carry out an armed reconnaissance over Sarande – Tepelene – Valona – Argyrokastron, bombing Valona airfield and damaging (on the ground) three Savoia-Marchetti S.81. Three Fiat CR.42 from 394ª Squadriglia scramble to attack, damaging all three Blenheims.

The early stages of the air war, October–November 1940



10. 6th November 1940. Six Wellingtons from 70th Squadron RAF on a bomb run on Valona, are intercepted by Fiat CR.42s from 154° Gruppo. Two Wellingtons are shot down and two more damaged, one Fiat CR.42 is damaged and crashes while landing.

11. Night 14–15th November. RAF attack on Italy. Two Wellingtons from 70th Squadron RAF bomb Bari oil refinery.

12. Night 16–17th November. New attack on Italy. Four Wellingtons from 70th Squadron RAF bomb oil tanks at Brindisi.

13. November. Three Blenheim Mk I from No.30 Squadron strike the Italian airfield near Argirocastro destroying one Ro.37bis, one Ca.133 and damaging one CR.42

damage to the landing ground and to three S.81s. The RAF bombers were counter-attacked by four CR.42s from the 364ª Squadriglia scrambled from Valona and were so badly mauled that they could barely return to Eleusis. One of their gunners, Sergeant John Merifield, was the first British airman killed in action in Greece and his solemn funeral was attended by the Prime Minister himself, Ioannis Metaxas.

On 7 November, six Vickers Wellingtons from No.70 Squadron, redeployed from their base at Kabrit in Egypt to Eleusis, attacked Valona in daylight. Two bombers were shot down by two G.50s from the 154° Gruppo that were patrolling over Valona, and two more were heavily damaged by five CR.42s from the 364ª Squadriglia scrambled from the local airfield. On their way back to Eleusis, the Wellingtons had a brief engagement with three seaplanes from the 35° Stormo. One of these was forced to ditch and went missing, its crew being rescued by another CANT Z.506B.

Soddu officially replaced Visconti Prasca on 9 November and reorganized the Italian troops creating two field armies: 9th Army in the Koritza sector, and 11th Army, in Epirus, which reached Margarithy and Paramythia on the same day, giving the illusion the offensive could still progress. The awful weather caused a general interruption of flying operations from 8 to 10 November, with very few sorties being flown. Italian bombers were active again on 11 November, but the sky was still cloudy and several patrols dropped their bombs on the alternative target of Yannina, the only visible one. Others were able to carry on with their intended tasks, battering the rear areas of the Greek Army, but in spite of the massive effort, the results were uncertain. As the commanding officer of the 46° Stormo wrote in analysing a report from the subordinated 104° Gruppo, 'such attacks being harassing actions over a large area and against small and scarcely visible targets, I assume their effect can be considered satisfactory even if the aiming is quite often not perfectly registered on the intended target'.

Mussolini advocated a bombing campaign that, besides showing the Greek people the futility of the British support, was to disorganize civilian life in the main cities and weaken the will to fight in accordance with Douhet's theory, but the way the conflict was going imposed other priorities. The RA was to support the army and had very little spare capacity for other tasks, while 11 November also marked the start of the airlift intended to quickly transfer reinforcements and supplies from Italy to Albania. This was a last-ditch measure, forced upon the already hard-pressed air force by the status of the Albanian ports and by a disorganized logistics system. On that very day, ten S.81 bombers from 55° Gruppo and four Ca.133 transport aircraft transferred 244 'Alpini', mountain troops, and 12 tons of supplies to Tirana. The troops that were arriving by air, however, arrived in penny packets without their heavy weapons and their logistical support, and surely were not the solution for properly reinforcing the units on the front.

A CANT Z.1007bis is being armed by the ground crew before a bombing mission. The usual bombload was 18 50kg bombs, but other often-used solutions were two 250kg bombs and three 100kg bombs or four 250kg bombs, according to the type of target. (AC)

The air war was not a one-sided affair. Valona was bombed twice on 11 November, although with little damage, and that night, while Royal Navy torpedo-bombers caused havoc at Taranto, two Wellingtons from No.70 Squadron attacked Valona and four attacked Durazzo. During the day, while the Italian air observation aircraft reconnoitred the enemy's positions, Greek aircraft were doing the same, with Blenheims from 32 Mira supplementing the Potez and the Henschels that had already suffered heavy losses. On 11 November a pair of G.50s from the 395ª Squadriglia shot down a Blenheim that was on a reconnaissance mission near Argirocastro, with the death of the three crew members. Although lacking a ground control system, combat patrols by the Italian fighters were a relevant factor. Both British and Greek Blenheims carried on

Enduring the difficult conditions in Greek airfields. Officers from RAF No.211 Squadron at Paramythia, having an open-air lunch. Top right, seated, is the Squadron Leader J.R. Gordon-Finlayson. (IWM)

operating in daylight, relying on speed and manoeuvrability, but No.70 Squadron, whenever it redeployed from Egypt to Greece, would send its Wellingtons into action at night only. In the following two days, both sides flew very few sorties due to bad weather again, but in the late afternoon of 13 November, three Blenheim Mk Is from No.30 Squadron were able to strike at the advanced Italian airfield near Argirocastro, destroying one Ro.37bis and one Ca.133 and damaging one CR.42.

The Greeks on the offensive

The Greek Army counter-attacked in Western Macedonia on 14 November, taking advantage not only of the mismanagement of the Italian offensive, but also of the acquired numerical superiority and the bad weather that for two days had prevented any effective air operation and deprived the Italians of their most valid resource. The Greeks occupied Ersekë on 17 November and Koritza on 22 November while the Italians withdrew on a defensive line from Pogradec to Porto Palermo.

On 14 November, both sides produced a sustained effort in the sky. The Italian bombers from Albania and Puglia swarmed in small patrols over the region of the Prespa Lakes and on the roads leading to Koritza. At the same time, as a direct consequence of the confusion caused by the conflicting orders from Rome and Tirana, some patrols were ordered to bomb Larissa, aiming at the railway station and the airfield, the airfield at Yannina and the harbours of Corfu and Argostoli, on the island of Kefalonia. An intended raid on Salonika by nine aircraft from Brindisi 107° Gruppo aborted following the accidental explosion of a bomb being loaded onto a CANT Z.1007bis that destroyed the bomber, killing five airmen and injuring two others. EVA bombers raided repeatedly the airfields at Drenovë and Koritza, where two CR.42 fighters and a Ca.133 transport aircraft were destroyed. A Bristol Blenheim Mk. IV from 32 Mira was shot down by anti-aircraft artillery and two more, together with a 33 Mira Fairey Battle, were heavily damaged by ground fire or the scrambled fighters of the 160° Gruppo. Greek air co-operation aircraft reconnaissance were cruising over the battle area to monitor the progress of the army and to harass the Italian reinforcements moving towards the front. A Potez 25A from 4 Mira was lost to ground fire and an Hs 126 of a patrol of three from 3 Mira returned from

A Henschel Hs 126 reconnaissance and ground-attack aircraft in Albania in 1941. Fifteen of these, acquired from Germany, equipped the 3 Mira Stratiotkis Synergassias (*Army Co-operation Squadron*). (Athens War Museum)

a strafing mission over the Pogradec–Koritza road with a dead crew member and was so badly mauled by machine-gun bullets that it was written off. Low clouds forced the bombers to fly close to the bottom of the valleys with very little freedom to manoeuvre and two Bristol Blenheim Mk Is of a patrol of three from No.84 Squadron crashed on a mountain ridge while trying to attack the Pogradec–Koritza road to block the main Italian supply line in the area.

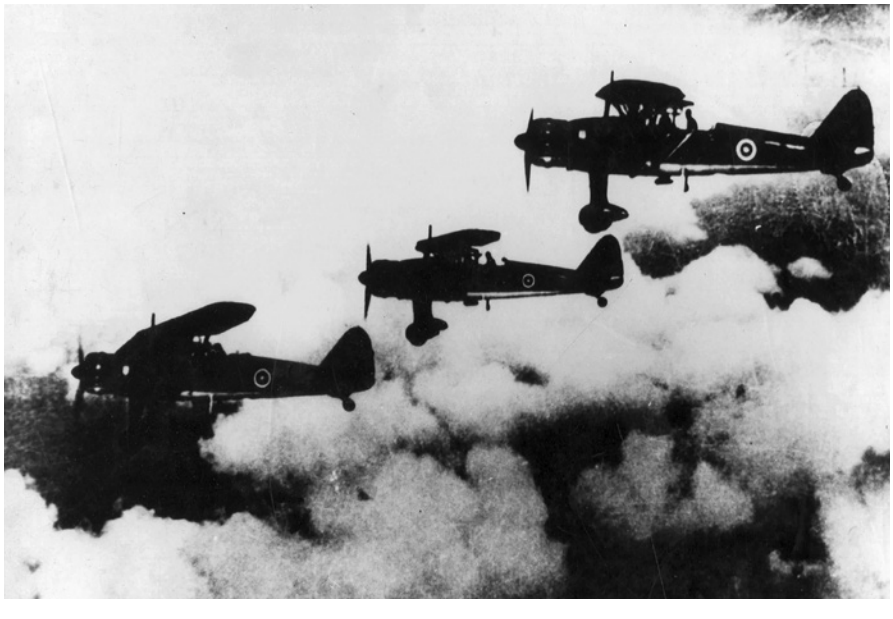
In the coastal region, six Fairey Battles from 33 Mira attacked the airfield at Argirocastro claiming the destruction of about ten aircraft, while in fact none was seriously damaged, and vanished among the clouds before a couple of CR.42s could get within firing distance. In the morning, nine PZLs of 23 Mira took off from Larissa to conduct a fighter sweep over the front line with the aim of achieving temporary air superiority. This large patrol first engaged in combat a single CR.42 from the 363ª Squadriglia that was immediately shot down, then engaged three pairs of CR.42s from the same unit. Later one CR.42 from the 393ª Squadriglia entered into combat with three PZLs and in a separate dogfight three CR.42s from the 363ª and 393ª Squadriglie engaged six PZLs, losing two of their number. Lastly, three CR.42s attacked and scattered a ten-aircraft-strong patrol, claiming three victories. At the end the EVA celebrated a very successful day, reporting eight Italian fighters destroyed, while in reality there were three, with three more damaged. Italian claims amounted to six PZLs but no Greek fighter was actually lost on 14 November, even if four PZLs were damaged in combat.

The next day, the RA divided the available resources between a counter-air effort, targeting mainly the airport at Larissa, and the usual near-battlefield interdiction operations, mainly in the Koritza sector. The results were again ambiguous, with no clear measure of how successful these attacks were, but it was noticed that the roads were mostly empty, which suggested that all major movements happened at night in order to escape the unwanted attention of the ever-present Italian aircraft. The current method of operation was again the use of small patrols of two–three bombers, or even single aircraft, to hammer as many targets as possible, and to use persistent harassing action from dawn to dusk. One S.81 from the 39° Gruppo did not return to Valona, shot down as it was by anti-aircraft fire during an isolated bombing mission east of the river Devoli. Greek fighters were still in the air and five PZLs attacked five S.79s from the 104° Gruppo en route to bomb some artillery emplacements, forcing one of them to crash-land near Koritza, with one dead and one wounded among the crew. Later four PZLs, which were escorting three Blenheims from No.30 Squadron over the Italian defensive positions blocking the way to Koritza, clashed briefly with ten G.50s from the 154° Gruppo, whose pilots claimed one kill, with a second one given as probable. Soon after, the same but now unescorted patrol of No.30 Squadron was assaulted by three CR.42s from the 393ª Squadriglia that shot down one of the bombers and caused serious damage to the others. A few minutes later, Sottotenente Maurizio Nicolis di Robilant from the 363ª Squadriglia, while escorting a Ro.37bis from 72° Gruppo in his CR.42 in a tactical reconnaissance mission, attacked three Fairey Battles from 33 Mira that were flying in a loose V formation towards Koritza and disposed immediately of two of them. He gave chase to the third one until he saw the single-engine bomber losing altitude and trailing smoke.

After rejoining his charge and completing his mission, Nicolis di Robilant landed at his base at Koritza claiming three kills. He was not wrong; the third Fairy Battle crash-landed at Yannina with the gunner fatally wounded. It was a bad day indeed for the small EVA bomber force, which also lost one Potez 63 out of a patrol of three that was sent to attack Italian positions on the river Devoli. It was an unfortunate case of 'fratricide', since the Potez fell victim of the Greek anti-aircraft artillery while on the way home.

The RA was now fully dedicated to supporting the army and the cry for help coming from Tirana brushed aside any idea of striking at distant targets like Salonika, which had been planned for 'Action M', for now staying on paper. Ubiquity and persistency were the characteristics required of bombing operations at tactical level. To this purpose small patrols from the 38° and the 46° Stormi, operating from Albania, and from the 35°, the 37° and the 47° Stormi operating from Puglia, together with the 50°, the 96° and the newly arrived 41° Gruppi, redeployed at Brindisi on 11 November with its CANT Z.1007bis, were spanning their action across daylight hours, repeatedly attacking the same objectives every day. The list of targets was updated late at night by Comando Aeronautica Albania based on the requests from Comando Superiore Truppe Albania and forwarded to the IV ZAT. The subsequent operational orders were issued early in the morning, just in time to define the flight schedule. Fighters from the Albanian airfields were called upon to send out patrols over the designated targets and, in predefined time windows, to provide indirect escort to the bombers. However, fighter patrols could not guarantee any protection against the anti-aircraft artillery now deployed in large numbers around the most important sites, and on 16 November a CANT Z.506B from 86° Gruppo BM with its crew fell prey to it over Kalpaki. During the night of 17–18 November, Valona and Durazzo were bombed with limited effect by two patrols of three

A PZL P.24 fighter being refuelled and armed, probably in October 1940. The poor condition of most of the Greek airfields did not prevent the Greek Air Force from maintaining a high level of efficiency from its aircraft. (Athens War Museum)



Three PZL P.24 fighters in flight, using a classic 'V' formation. The Greek tactics seem to have been more than a match for the Regia Aeronautica in 1940–41.(Hellenic Air Force Historical Branch)

Wellingtons, each from No.70 Squadron. The cloudy sky was a tricky environment also for the well-trained RAF aircrew and one of the three bombers sent over Durazzo lost course and crashed on the mountains across the border with Yugoslavia.

Now and then Greek fighters tried to interfere with this tactical bombing campaign. On 18 November, nine PZLs attacked a two CANT Z.1007bis patrol from the 50° Gruppo. Return fire hit the fighter of Sminias Gregorios Valcanas, from 23 Mira, which crashed into the tail of the bomber he was firing at, so that both aircraft went down and met their end. A pair of S.79s from the 105° Gruppo was also attacked by three PZLs in the area of Koniza and one of them was shot down, while the other three-engine bomber escaped with little damage, thanks to three CR.42s from 363ª Squadriglia that counter-attacked the Greek fighters. On the same day there were other clashes between PZLs and CR.42s and, in spite of what the propaganda stated at the time – still echoed today – four PZLs were shot down or forced to a crash-landing while all CR.42s returned to their bases.

The Gloster Gladiator factor

To ease the pressure on the EVA fighter squadrons, on 19 November RAF No.80 Squadron B Flight with its Gloster Gladiators arrived at Trikkala from Egypt via Crete and Eleusis, to soon be joined by A Flight. In the afternoon, nine of these newcomers left for a fighter sweep over the battle area, with three PZLs leading the way. Intended as it was as a familiarization mission, with the aim of acquainting RAF pilots with the new theatre of operations, it ended up as a milestone of the campaign. The Greek-British mixed formation engaged in sequence several small patrols of Italian fighters, dealing with them one by one. It first met four CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo, shooting down one of them. The PZLs then broke formation due to their limited range, but the Gladiators carried on and

A Blenheim Mk I of RAF No.211 Squadron warming up the engines before taxiing at the Menidi/Tatoi airfield near Athens, apparently in April 1941. Only the airfields near Athens were considered adequate by the RAF, the others being usually just flattened strips of land lacking any sort of utilities or facilities. (IWM)

came across six CR.42s from the same gruppo, that lost two of their number claiming two victories on their side. Lastly, the No.80 Squadron patrol engaged two G.50s, one from 24° Gruppo and one from 154° Gruppo, shooting down the second, while the other managed to get away and land at Tirana to report a likely victory on its side. British pilots returned to Trikkala reporting a score of six CR.42s and three G.50s, with two more biplane fighters given as probably destroyed, against one Gloster Gladiator heavily damaged but successfully flown back home by its seriously wounded pilot. The real score was quite different. The RA lost three CR.42s and one G.50, less than half the number of aircraft credited to No.80 Squadron. A change in tactics was indeed required and Pricolo, at the time in Tirana, ordered abandoning the small patrols system in favour of having fighters operating in large formations – the aim being to outnumber any enemy aircraft likely to be in the air in any specific area. He also wanted his bombers to operate in larger numbers against targets like airfields, harbours and cities, and not in small patrols against targets of just tactical relevance, but the urgent needs of the army were to dictate otherwise. Furthermore, the weather was again an impassable obstacle, blocking the counter-air missions planned for 20 November against Larissa, Salonika and Kozani.

On 21 November, Koritza and Drenovë were abandoned, with the 160° Gruppo CT redeploying to Devoli, after destroying seven unserviceable CR.42s, and the 25ª Squadriglia OA from 72° Gruppo OA redeploying to Tirana. The weather was always an overwhelming factor and cloud limited air operations from 20 to 24 November. Fighter squadrons were now flying combat patrols of 12–15 aircraft. On 22 November, one such patrol from the 160° Gruppo, while escorting five S.79s from the 104° Gruppo in the area of Koritza, fell upon a lone Hs 126 from 3 Mira and sent it crashing near Kapetista (Kapshticë). Italian fighters were successful again two days later, when two patrols of G.50s from the 24° Gruppo, one of three aircraft from Durazzo and one of four from Tirana, dived upon nine Blenheims from the newly arrived No.211 Squadron that were bombing Durazzo. In the following game of hide-and-seek among the clouds, the Italian pilots claimed three kills and did not overclaim. Two crippled British bombers could not make it back to Menidi and a third one, which belly-landed with one engine jammed, had to be written off as well.

When the weather improved, the focus switched from the 9th Army sector west of Koritza, where the front looked now quite stable, to the 11th Army, which was now in full retreat towards the Albanian border and beyond. As far as the still-cloudy and rainy conditions allowed, all bomber squadrons from Puglia attacked the bridges over the Kalamas and all choke points in the Greek Army rear, from Perati to Ersekë, as well as Corfu, which was still on the target list. As usual, the raids took place throughout daylight hours, in order to achieve persistence and continuity of action, and the three-aircraft patrols used 50kg and 15kg ordnance in order to maximize the number of bombs and the subsequent saturation effect against area targets. Direct fighter escort was not envisaged, but fighters from Albania were patrolling the sky in large formations over the planned objectives in the timeframe the bombers had to arrive. Now and then, this pattern was altered to include specific tasks, such as on 27 November, when eight S.79s from the 105° Gruppo took off from Tirana and, with 15 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo providing indirect escort, bombed the airfield at Kozani. As soon as they landed at Tirana, the ground personnel refuelled the 15 fighters which took off again on a strafing mission against the same target. This counter-air effort paid off with the destruction of all remaining Breguet XIXs of 2 Mira, which was literally removed from the EVA order of battle.

Starting on 26 November, a number of Gladiators from No.80 Squadron redeployed daily from Trikkala to Yannina to carry out offensive patrols in the area. On the following day over Tepeleni, nine Gladiators engaged three CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo, which had detached from a larger patrol to give chase to some Blenheims, and shot down one of them, while a second Italian fighter, although damaged, was flown back to Valona by its wounded pilot. The killed pilot had been the commanding officer of the 364ª Squadriglia, Capitano Nicola

The ground crew of 24 Mira posing in front of a Bloch MB 151 fighter. The Greek Air Force had acquired six of these fighters from France, the only type of fighter in use other than the Polish PZL P.24 and two Gloster Gladiators. (Athens War Museum)

Magaldi, a former bomber pilot who had distinguished himself as an inspiring leader and was awarded a posthumous gold medal for bravery.

On 27 November, Pricolo stated once more that the air force's main task was to support the army in containing the enemy offensive. Furthermore, in order to provide the bombers with the requisite safe environment, fighter squadrons were to gain local air superiority and maintain it as long as required. Fighter squadrons had also to execute strafing missions, both planned and unplanned, since the appearance of aircraft was quite often enough to stop all activity by enemy troops. Another bomber squadron, the 42° Gruppo BT, which on the same day redeployed from Capodichino (Naples) to Grottaglie (Taranto) with 14 S.79s, was allowed to increase the pressure, which was now needed mostly between the valleys of the Vojussa and the Drino, where the enemy threatened to break through and divide 9th Army from 11th Army.

In this scenario, on 28 November six Gloster Gladiators from No.80 Squadron, while flying an offensive patrol in the coastal region, clashed with ten CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo, led by Capitano Giorgio Graffer, the commanding officer of 365ª Squadriglia and an ace with five confirmed victories. The Italian patrol attacked three Gladiators that were flying at lower altitude, one Gladiator and one CR.42 collided and went down killing both their pilots, then the CR.42s were attacked by the other three Gladiators flying top cover. This *ruse de guerre* and the 'dive and zoom' tactics paid off, two CR.42s were quickly disposed of, including Graffer's, and two more were damaged. Graffer, who besides being a well-known pilot was a celebrated alpinist, was quite popular among his men, who deeply felt his loss. Like Magaldi, he received a posthumous gold medal for bravery. Once again, both sides overestimated their scores: British pilots claimed six victories, twice the number of aircraft lost by the 150° Gruppo; Italian pilots claimed three, wheras No.80 Squadron lost only one Gladiator and had three damaged. On the same day, RAF bombers attacked both Santi Quaranta (Sarandë) and Durazzo. Over Santi Quaranta, the three-Blenheim patrol from No.211 Squadron was not engaged by fighters, but over Durazzo two G.50s from the 24° Gruppo that were patrolling the area fell upon three Blenheims from No.84 Squadron and forced one of the bombers to crash-land near Devoli, where its three-man crew was captured. A measure of the effort sustained by the RA on 28 November is the number of

sorties registered at the end of the day, 150 for Comando Aeronautica Albania and 151 for the IV ZAT, almost all of them in support of the army in a near-battlefield interdiction scenario.

On 30 November the weather imposed another lull in flying operations that was to last for a couple of days, leaving ground only for the airlift from Puglia and for difficult airdrops in support of the army. Given the appalling condition of mountain roads and mule-tracks, airdrops were badly needed for supplying troops. Air observation aircraft flew even when medium-altitude bombers did not, and they were performing both a reconnaissance and a ground-attack role. Their losses during the campaign are surprisingly light, but 2 December 1940 was a very bad day for 72° Gruppo OA. Three of its Ro.37bis failed to return, two of them shot down by Flight Lieutenant Marmaduke Thomas St John Pattle, a young South African officer from No.80 Squadron who was already an ace with six victories to his credit.

The winter battles

The temporary lull in bombing operations contributed to the advance of the Greek Army to Pogradec, which the Italians abandoned on 4 December. Cloud and low visibility in the region were also the likely cause of the 'fratricide' incident that happened on 3 December, when a number of CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo shot down a BR.20 from the 116° Gruppo and badly damaged another that had to land at Valona. On the same day, many small bomber patrols swarmed over the battle area and the IV ZAT alone counted 146 sorties, most of them on the 11th Army front since north of the Pindus range fog and clouds did not allow medium-altitude bombers to operate. In that area, however, 18 CR.42s that were escorting five S.79s from the 105° Gruppo over Hosnati, in the Koritza sector, clashed with six PZLs from 23 Mira, claiming three victories, with no losses on their side. Only one Greek fighter was actually destroyed and two damaged, but, whatever the score, the RA was maintaining an adequate level of air superiority, allowing Italian bombers to operate quite at their will, as far as the weather allowed. The real issue was the inadequacy of both equipment and procedures for the air-to-ground role in support of the army. For instance, it is significant that the five S.79s escorted by CR.42s could not complete their task because thick banks of clouds completely masked the target.

No.80 Squadron Gloster Gladiators patrolled the area quite regularly but they usually ended up clashing with large patrols of Italian fighters that were quite successful in holding them off the bombers. On 5 December, over Perati, 15 CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo engaged 14 Gladiators from No.80 Squadron that were carrying out a fighter sweep towards Tepeleni. As usual, the Gladiators were flying in two patrols, one at low altitude and one at high altitude, in order to lure into a trap any careless enemy fighter. Italian pilots were now familiar with these tactics and the CR.42s had top cover from ten G.50s from the 24° Gruppo. However, their leader, the commanding officer of the 150° Gruppo, Tenente Colonnello Rolando Pratelli, could not call them into the fight because Italian fighters were not radio-equipped. At the end of a hard air battle, both sides once more claimed an unrealistic number of victories: nine, plus two

A last-minute briefing for the crew of a BR.20 of the 221ª Squadriglia (55° Gruppo, 37° Stormo BT). Due to the fast-developing situation on the ground, operational orders were often issued just before take-off. The heavy flight suits speak for the conditions these men had to endure.(AC)

Two G.50s of the 352ª Squadriglia CT (20° Gruppo CT) on patrol. This sturdy fighter was present in Albania with both the 24° Gruppo CT and the 154° Gruppo CT. (AC)

probables, the British; three, plus three probables, the Italians. It can now be stated that, while 150° Gruppo lost two CR.42s with their pilots, all Gladiators landed safely at Yannina, from where they returned to Larissa on the following day. Meanwhile, on 3 December the IV ZAT gave birth to an operational command, 4ª Squadra Aerea, or 4th Air Fleet, with Ilari in charge. The new command had the operational control of RA units operating from the area under jurisdiction of the IV ZAT, that maintained full authority for all administrative and technical matters. From 5 December all bomber squadrons again switched to hammering the rear of the Greek troops pressing on from Pogradec, in 9th Army sector. A new procedure was designed to help the crews find their targets, by using a 1:50,000-scale map with each square identified by two letters and each point of interest identified by its Cartesian co-ordinates within the relevant square. It was the same system in use during World War One to identify targets for the artillery and to register shooting from the air.

Pogradec was the most important town captured by the Greeks after Koritza, but very soon 11th Army had to face an even more critical situation in its sector. Permeti was lost on 3 December, Argirocastro on 4 December and Santi Quaranta on 6 December. Valona and Elbasan were now under threat. The RA was called upon to support both armies, and the targets that Ranza signalled every day were now well inside the Albanian border. All available bombers were sent into action as long as the weather did not hamper their operations and their action was felt and noticed by Greek headquarters, which ordered the troops to stop all movement in daylight and to carefully mask encampments and weapon sites. The RAF tried to replicate on 7 December, when three waves of Blenheims attacked Valona exploiting the banks of clouds to avoid the fighters on patrol. They caused very little damage but, out of 26 aircraft, two crashed on the mountains while the combat patrol of CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo shot down two more and forced another to crash-land in Greek territory. From 8 to 12 December very few sorties were recorded, due again to appalling weather conditions, but right on 10 December, 53 Junkers Ju 52/3ms from III./KGzbV 1 arrived at Foggia to take over the burden of the airlift. The three-engine Junkers were well equipped to fly in adverse weather conditions and their crews were aptly trained in instrument flying, which meant the airlift went on day in and day out, throughout the winter season. Meanwhile the 42° Gruppo BT was withdrawn from Puglia, but the 4th Air Fleet was reinforced with the 97° Gruppo BaT, redeployed from Trapani to Lecce with 14 Ju 87s.

Two Ju 87s of the RA flying at high altitude over the coast. The 96° Gruppo BaT, and also the 97° when it entered the fray in December, were based at Lecce, which means that the B-2 version could reach targets only in the coastal area.(AC)

On the morning of 14 December, low visibility and poor air-to-ground co-ordination caused a significant friendly fire incident. While on a bombing run towards the Greek positions, three BR.20s from the 37° Stormo dropped their load too early and hit a field hospital of the Siena Infantry Division next to Himara, causing 20 dead. Soon after, another patrol of three BR.20s bombed the front line of the Siena, killing 20 soldiers and wounding many more. From 15 to 17 December, the weather prevented offensive operations, but the airlift and the airdrop missions continued, even if facing enormous difficulties. On 18 December, both sides resumed bombing operations and while Italian bombers had only to deal with the clouds and the anti-aircraft fire, the patrol of three Blenheims from No.30 Squadron that attacked Valona was assaulted by three CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo, which after a long pursuit shot down one of the bombers in the sea off Argirocastro. The following day, during a fighter sweep, 13 Gladiators from No.30 Squadron fell upon five CANT

Four BR.20s of the 276ª Squadriglia (116° Gruppo, 37° Stormo BT) approaching their target over the snow-covered rugged terrain of the Albanian-Greek border region. The dorsal turrets are ready for action, and so are the belly defensive positions, with the 'mandible' fully open to allow the gunner to aptly traverse and depress his Breda-SAFAT 7.7mm machine gun.(AC)

On 20 January 1941, in the early afternoon, four CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo and five from the 107° Gruppo bombed Piraeus, the first patrol dropping 48 100kg bombs and the second 20 250kg bombs. The second patrol lost one aircraft to five Gloster Gladiators of No.80 Squadron and one of the British fighters was hit by return fire and crash-landed at Hassani airfield near Athens, killing its pilot, Pilot Officer V.A.J. Stuckey.(AC)

Z.1007bis from the 41° Gruppo. In a rare feat seldom remembered, the five bombers, under the command of Maggiore Giovanni Raina, tightened their V formation, carried on their task of bombing the village of Kolonja in the coastal region and fended off the attacks of the fighters, shooting two of them down. One of the British pilots bailed out from his burning Gladiator; the other died soon after he crash-landed. Three bombers were damaged, and on one of them there were three aircrew wounded, but all five landed safely at Brindisi.

The pounding of hamlets, road junctions and bridges in the area between Perati and the coast went on for a few days causing quite a difficult time for the hard-pressed Italian Army. Then the situation slowly improved, thanks also to the measures put in place by Generale d'Armata (General) Ugo Cavallero, who early in December replaced Field Marshal Badoglio as Chief of General Staff and at the end of the month would take command of the Italian forces in Albania replacing Soddu. How critical those days were is confirmed by the strafing mission on the coastal road near Porto Palermo carried out on 20 December by 12 G.50s from 2° Gruppo CT and by ten C.200s from 153° Gruppo, the only time before March that fighters from Puglia operated in Albania. It was also a kind of farewell mission, since the following day the 2° Gruppo left Grottaglie for Tripoli.

On 20 December, the 4ª Squadra Aerea recorded 210 sorties, with 114 tons of ordnance delivered, and the Comando Aeronautica Albania 148 sorties, with more than 20 tons of ordnance delivered against the loss of one S.79 from the 104° Gruppo and one S.81 from the 39° Gruppo, both accounted for by the Gloster Gladiators of No.80 Squadron. Italian bombers began to operate at night sending out S.81s from the 37° Stormo and CANT Z.1007bis from the 47° Stormo in single-aircraft attacks against the main coastal road and the harbour of Patras.

Air operations on 21 December followed the same pattern, with bombers from Puglia and Albania attacking the usual list of targets at tactical level. Two Ju 87s from 96° Gruppo BaT were shot down by ground fire between Golem and Kolonja, while a Potez 63 from 31 Mira was destroyed by three G.50s from 154° Gruppo, led by Tenente Livio Bassi, while it was carrying out a reconnaissance sortie towards Berat. In the afternoon, a major air battle had ten fighters from No.80 Squadron pitted against 15 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo that were escorting three CANT Z.1007bis from the 107° Gruppo over Golem, and six CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo, that were cruising between the Drino valley and the sea and joined the fight. At the end, eight Gloster Gladiators landed at Yannina to claim eight kills plus three probable, 12 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo landed at Tirana also claiming eight kills and six CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo landed at Valona claiming two. The real score was two Gloster Gladiators lost and four heavily damaged on one side, three CR.42s lost and six heavily damaged on the other. On the same day, No.80

Squadron withdrew to Larissa while 21 Mira, now equipped with second-hand Gloster Gladiators, moved to Yannina.

Foul weather hampered air operations until 28 December but Preveza entered the list of targets since the Greeks used that harbour to supply their troops in Albania. Air operations resumed at full speed on 29 December, when Italian bombers had to face only ground fire, while three Blenheims from No.211 Squadron, which tried to attack Valona, were intercepted by three G.50s from the 154° Gruppo which were cruising over the city. The Italian fighters shot down one bomber and heavily damaged the others, but the combat air patrol system was considered a serious drain on resources since it required such an enormous amount of flight hours. Therefore, the order came from Rome to study an air defence system based on advance observation posts linked via telephone to fighter control stations at the main airfields. The system required both ground radio stations, which were available, and airborne radio sets, which were just starting to reach the squadrons. The Air Staff wanted to have a radio receiver on one fighter out of three, pending the availability of the number of sets required. For the time being, however, nothing changed and the combat air patrol system stayed.

One CANT Z.506B from the 86° Gruppo went missing off Preveza on 30 December, after clashing with two Bristol Blenheim Mk IFs from No.30 Squadron, and on New Year's Eve the Regia Aeronautica, besides carrying out the usual offensive operations at tactical level and attacking the airfields at Yannina and Kozani, returned to Salonika with two patrols of five CANT Z.1007bis from the 47° Stormo. Then the weather turned bad again and very few sorties were flown until 7 January, when offensive operations slowly resumed. Meanwhile, on the day of Epiphany (6 January), three G.50s from the 154° Gruppo shot down two Blenheims out of a formation of nine from No.211 Squadron that was raiding Valona. A third Blenheim was heavily damaged on the way home by three CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo scrambled from Valona and crash-landed in Greek territory. To sum up the day, an Hs 126 from 3 Mira fell prey to anti-aircraft artillery while on a reconnaissance mission near Pogradec. The substantial lull in flying allowed Ranza to reassess the status of his command; he requested changing 38° Stormo BT's S.81s to BR.20s, which would happen between February and March; he also pressed for a second air observation squadron, which resulted in the transfer of 5° Gruppo OA from Bari to Devoli between 13 and 15 January.

Two Ju 87s of the RA ready to take off, very likely for a training sortie, since they are not armed. These aircraft were the most effective solution to supporting the army, but the RA had too few of them. (AC)

On 8 January, three CANT Z.1007bis from the 47° Stormo bombed Salonika again fending off the attacks of several fighters. While the bombers were again harassing the enemy's lines of communication and the logistics facilities next to the front line, nine G.50s from the 154° Gruppo clashed with 12 fighters comprising Gloster Gladiators from 21 Mira and PZLs from 22 Mira. In the end, Italian pilots claimed four victories, Greek pilots two, but all G.50s returned safely to their base and so did their adversaries. The following day, the Greek Army occupied Klisura (Këlcyrë), gaining its last significant success, and on the same day the weather worsened, preventing any relevant flight activity until 13 January. The main target was now Preveza, which was bombed both at day and at night, which was not a common method of operation for the RA since most pilots had not enough training in low-visibility flying. In less than 24 hours, the weather turned bad again, forbidding most raids planned against tactical targets in the Permeti, Klisura and Argirocastro regions. On 14 January, the only bombing mission was carried out by four aircraft from the 41° Gruppo, that were led by Tenente Colonnello (Wing Commander) Ettore Muti to drop 16 110kg and 24 50kg bombs on the road from Kozani to Larissa, barely visible through the clouds from an altitude of 3,000m. For the 41° Gruppo it was the last mission of the campaign. Muti and his men were soon to leave Brindisi for Littoria, nowadays Latina, where the squadron converted to the torpedo-bomber role and was re-equipped with the new S.84. They left their CANT Z.1007bis to 95° Gruppo which converted from maritime to land bomber squadron.

The second half of January 1941 did not allow any major offensive operations. Appalling weather conditions grounded the bombers in Puglia and in Albania, and affected even the air bridge from Foggia to Devoli and Tirana, with a significant reduction in the daily number of sorties. Airdrop sorties in support of the army were carried out by S.81s flying at low altitude beneath the clouds, as were also the air observation Ro.37bis, in their tactical reconnaissance and ground-attack missions, and the fighters sent to strafe the entrenched Greek troops and the logistics facilities in their immediate rear. On 12 January, the 150° Gruppo lost one CR.42 out of a 14-aircraft formation to ground fire during a strafing mission over the Mali Topojanit.

The front was now stable enough to allow withdrawing the 105° Gruppo from Albania, in order to ease the pressure on the logistics system. It moved to Bari with 18 S.79s on 20 January and transferred to the 4ª Squadra Aerea as an independent bomber squadron. Due to the improved situation at the front, Ilari could now send his bombers against targets at the operational level of conflict, such as the logistics infrastructure – as envisaged by the directive issued for the so-called Operation *L*. Nine bombers from 47° Stormo bombed Piraeus and while the first patrol of four aircraft was able to complete the bomb run before five Gladiators from No.80 Squadron could get into firing range, the second one had to sustain a long fight. Eventually the British fighters shot down one CANT Z.1007bis but one of them fell under the response fire of the bombers. While the majority of sorties were still flown at tactical level against the communication line Himara–Permeti–Klisura, on 21 January four CANT Z.1007bis from the 50° Gruppo bombed Salonika and five, Volos, while five BR.20s from the 116° Gruppo bombed the harbour of Preveza.

The weather was again prohibitive for medium-altitude bombing from 22 to 24 January, but on 25 January the bombers went back into the fray. Salonika was attacked by two patrols of five CANT Z.1007bis from the 50° Gruppo and one of four from the 107° Gruppo, which lost one of its aircraft to anti-aircraft artillery. Greek fighters chased the patrol's three remaining bombers, which were able to fend them off and return to Grottaglie. Greek pilots were credited with three kills but the only Italian bomber lost was the one hit by ground fire. On the same day, two BR.20s from the 55° Gruppo were badly mauled by Greek fighters over Permeti and one of them crashed while attempting to land at Valona. In spite of these fighter-versus-bomber occurrences, most Italian bomber patrols had to face ground fire only and their attacks went on as long as the weather permitted, targeting mostly the Permeti–Klisura area, with Argirocastro as an alternative target when the clouds masked the primary one. Weather was always a factor to be dealt with and now and then the patrols returned with their bombload due to all possible

On the morning of 30 January 1941, Capitano Giuseppe Cenni led six Ju 87s of the 239ª Squadriglia (97° Gruppo BaT) to attack the road from Klisura to Tepeleni, destroying a bridge on the river Lomnizza, a tributary on the right bank of the Vojussa. The direct hit on the bridge was recorded by this photograph.(AC)

targets being totally invisible from medium altitude. Salonika was bombed again on 28 January by eight CANT Z.1007bis from the 47° Stormo, which quite easily evaded five MB151s from 24 Mira. However, one Italian bomber went missing that day, and another one was heavily damaged, when 12 Gloster Gladiators from No.80 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Pattle, attacked nine CANT Z.1007bis from the 95° Gruppo over Permeti.

On 30 January, 96° Gruppo BaT departed from Lecce heading to Benina, in Libya, while after the lull imposed by the foul weather on 29 January, bombers and dive-bombers were operating mainly over the valley of the Vojussa and the nearby mountain ridges, the Klisura–Permeti road and entrenchments, encampments and mule tracks in the Mali Trebescine region (Mali Trebeshine). Then the weather worsened again, limiting flight operations to a few fighter patrols and armed reconnaissance sorties by the air observation Ro.37bis. Bombing operations resumed on 8 February and continued according to the now usual concept of concentrating the effort against a small number of targets and repeatedly hammering them throughout the day. Nine PZLs from 22 Mira and six Gladiators from 21 Mira fell upon two patrols of three CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo but could not prevent the bombers from completing their bombing runs over Caizza and Suka, even if one of them could not make it back to Grottaglie and crash-landed near Lecce on the way home.

The following day, while the RA bombers maintained high pressure on the enemy's communication lines and staging areas, the RAF and the EVA tried to intervene and 15 CR.42s from the 150° Gruppo clashed with 12 Gloster Gladiators from No.80 Squadron, each side losing two aircraft. The Italian fighters were patrolling the area between Argirocastro and the Osum River to guarantee a safe path to some patrols of S.79s from the 105° Gruppo. The same task had 12 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo, which in the afternoon entered into combat with four Gloster Gladiators from 21 Mira and eight PZLs from 22 and 23 Mira, shooting down one Gladiator and one PZL without losses on their side. Some CANT Z.1007bis from the 50° Gruppo and the 47° Stormo bombed Salonika, Yannina, Preveza and the railway bridge over the Corinth Canal in daylight and bombed Patras at night. At the

Macchi C.200 of the 372ª Squadriglia (153° Gruppo CT) deployed from Treviso to Lecce on 3 November 1940. The 153° Gruppo was to provide air defence to the air and naval bases in Puglia. The only time it crossed the sea before March 1941 was on 20 December for a strafing attack on the coastal road near Porto Palermo. Then, in March 1941, its C.200s flew escort missions in support of the bombers operating from Puglia.(AC)

same time, the BR.20s from the 37° Stormo and the 37° Gruppo, as well as the S.79s from the 104° Gruppo and the 105° Gruppo and the Ju 87s from the 97° Gruppo, concentrated their efforts against targets of more tactical value. On 10 February, two CANT Z.506Bs from the 86° Gruppo bombed a fuel tank storage area near Navarino, in one of the last bombing missions by Italian seaplanes.

Despite the presence of enemy fighter patrols, Italian bombers were able to operate with some freedom, both over the battle zone and against distant counter-air and interdiction targets like Yannina, Larissa, Salonika and Volos, in accordance with the requirements of Operation *L*. On 10 February, 15 G.50s from the 24° Gruppo shot down a Gloster Gladiator out of a three-aircraft patrol from 21 Mira, and six G.50s from the 154° Gruppo disposed of a lone Potez 63 from 31 Mira that was attacking Italian artillery on the way to Tepeleni. The following day a Ju 87 from 97° Gruppo BaT was hit by ground fire over the Mali Trebescines and the two crews bailed out over the Italian lines. On 12 February, Argirocastro was the main target for the 47° Stormo, which lost one CANT Z.1007bis out of 15 to ground fire. At night four Wellingtons from No.37 Squadron, temporarily redeployed at Paramythia, attacked Valona, damaging several aircraft parked in the open, and Durazzo. Then a new period of foul weather reduced flying operations from Puglia to a minimum, while in Albania, as was often the case, fighters and observation aircraft went on performing significant activity. On 13 February both sides clashed repeatedly and six G.50s from the 154° Gruppo destroyed three Blenheims out of a patrol of six from No.11 Squadron, while a lone Potez 63 from 31 Mira was shot down by Tenente (Flying Officer) Ugo Drago flying a CR.42 from the 363ª Squadriglia. The bombers from Puglia returned to action on 16 February and the usual pattern of activity could be seen again, but with a more vigorous and aggressive bombing policy. Instead of irregular sorties by small numbers of aircraft against scattered objectives, raids by strong formations were now followed up by further attacks on the same target. Consequently, the Italian air effort in Albania and Greece was more concentrated and effective than before.

Enter the Hurricane

D'Albiac was willing to support a new Greek offensive towards Berat and Tepeleni by striking at the Italian logistics hubs and this led to some hard fighting with the combat debut of the Hurricane fighters that had just strengthened No.80 Squadron. The weekly report to the London War Cabinet reads: 'On the 20th, Hurricanes shot down four enemy fighters and Gladiators two, and possibly three.' The true score is instead two G.50s lost from the 154° Gruppo against two Blenheims plus one Gloster Gladiator heavily damaged, but the new player changed the rules of the game, stressing the need for faster fighters and different tactics. Both Italian pilots, Tenente Alfredo Fusco and Tenente Livio Bassi, were killed and awarded a posthumous gold medal for bravery.

Bad weather again limited flight operations in the coming days, but both sides carried on and on 22 February one CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo out of a patrol of five was forced to ditch off Preveza by two Blenheim fighters from No.30 Squadron and went missing with its crew, as happened also to a CANT Z.506B from 86° Gruppo sent to search for it. The weather was always a major factor and the following day five S.79s from the 104° Gruppo lost their way in fog and clouds during a bombing mission over Zareci and three of them landed in Yugoslavia, another in Italy and only one returned to Tirana. Earlier on the morning of 23 February, 12 G.50s from the 154° Gruppo had a clash with 15 Greek fighters, which were escorting a Potez 63 on a reconnaissance mission and shot down two Gloster Gladiators without losses on their side. Once again, both sides overclaimed, with the Greeks reporting three victories and the Italians four. Following this clash, all Greek fighters were withdrawn to the rear to rest and refit, leaving the ground to the RAF. On 26 February, 97° Gruppo lost a Ju 87 to ground fire near the bridge of Hani Balaban and the following day nine Hurricanes from No.80 and No.33 Squadron, while providing top cover over Valona to six Blenheims from No.211 Squadron and three from No.11 Squadron, shot down two out of three CR.42s from 150° Gruppo. Before the Hurricanes dived on them, however, the Italian fighters had damaged two bombers from No.211 Squadron and managed to cripple all three from No.11 Squadron, which crash-landed at Paramythia and had to be written off.

On 28 February the sun was shining again and Italian bombers were once more swarming not only over the Klisura–Permeti area and over the Mali Trebescines massif, but also over Preveza and Florina. In the afternoon, the Western Wing, which the RAF intermediate command had just created to manage air operations in Western Greece, reacted by sending

At 1550hrs on 2 March 1941, five CANT Z.1007bis led by Tenente Ernesto Sassi bombed the harbour and the city of Preveza, dropping 20 250kg bombs from more than 5,000m and meeting fierce anti-aircraft fire.(AC)

all available fighters in a massive sweep over the region between Tepeleni and the sea. For a couple of hours, Italian fighters and bombers and British fighters clashed in a series of furious air battles like never before. At the end, the RAF celebrated an overwhelming triumph claiming 27 victories (five BR.20s, three S.79s, six G.50s, 13 CR.42s) plus five probable kills and six damaged aircraft, against the loss of one Gloster Gladiator. It was indeed a victory but not to such a degree since actual Italian losses were four BR.20s, one G.50 and one CR.42, with 16 aircrew. It is fair to say that Italian pilots also overestimated their score claiming three kills plus three probables.

If D'Albiac hoped to reduce the pressure from the RA, he was utterly disappointed. Italian bombers were again in action, bombing targets in the Vojussa region, Florina and Preveza on the first day of March, the airport of Larissa, Florina, Preveza, Piqeras, Borsh and Kuc the following day, and again the airport of Larissa, Preveza and targets in the Vojussa and Mali Trebescines region on 3 March. Two CANT Z.1007bis out of a patrol of five from 50° Gruppo, which bombed Larissa on 3 March, were shot into the sea south-west of Corfu while on their way home, by three Hurricanes from No.80 Squadron. The previous day, in early afternoon, nine Blenheims from No.84 and No.211 Squadrons had attacked Devoli, destroying one Ro.37bis from 72° Gruppo and damaging three. It is worth noting that airdrop operations never stopped and even on 3 March, 15 S.81 sorties were allowed to deliver 150 tons of supplies in support of 11th Army.

On 4 March, before the weather hampered air operations again, the RA and the RAF engaged in a major air battle. A small Italian flotilla, comprising the cruiser *Riboty*, the destroyer *Andromeda* and three torpedo-boats, sailed down the coast from Valona and shelled the coastal road between Himara and Porto Palermo. Five Blenheims from No.84 Squadron and 15 from No.211 were immediately ordered to the area, with ten Hurricanes and three Gloster Gladiators from No.80 Squadron and 14 Gloster Gladiators from No.112 Squadron providing direct escort and top cover. The bombers went in to bomb in line astern, scoring just a few near misses, then 15 G.50s from 24° Gruppo dived on the escorting Hurricanes and shot down one of them. British and Italian fighters chased each other along the coast, with nine CR.42s also being involved in the fight. Pattle, who was leading the Hurricane patrol, claimed three G.50s plus a probable CR.42, while another two Hurricane pilots claimed two G.50s and three CR.42s between them. The Gladiator pilots on their part claimed two victories and four probable kills, and the Italian pilots set their score at six victories. Actual losses were two Hurricanes on the British side and two G.50s on the Italian side. This was the last operation over the Albanian front for No.80 Squadron; on 6 March it withdrew to Eleusis and then to Egypt, leaving its aircraft to No.112 and No.33 Squadrons, which moved to Paramythia.

The Italian Army was about to launch a new offensive. Therefore, between 5 and 7 March, the Comando Aeronautica Albania was reinforced. The 22° Gruppo Autonomo CT moved from Ciampino to Tirana with 37 Macchi C.200s, the 371ª Squadriglia CT was attached to the 150° Gruppo CT at Valona with ten C.200s and the 114ª Squadriglia OA, with eight Ro.37bis, together with the 238ª Squadriglia BaT, with 12 Ju 87s, reached Tirana. Meanwhile the newly established 208ª Squadriglia BaT arrived at Lecce from Lonate Pozzolo and the 73ª Squadriglia CT from Gorizia was temporarily attached to the 153° Gruppo CT at Brindisi. The weather was still posing a significant obstacle to air operations which resumed on 7 March for the Comando Aeronautica Albania and on 8 March, on the eve of the new offensive, for the 4ª Squadra Aerea. The aim was to disrupt the enemy's logistics and fire support organization, as well as the command-and-control structure, between the Scindeli and the Osum Valley.

For Ranza's command, 9 March 1941 was the most intense day of operations of the whole campaign, with 204 sorties registered, and the only loss was a C.200 from 22° Gruppo that suddenly left formation and disappeared, perhaps because the pilot faded out for unknown

Two Ju 87R-2s of the 208ª Squadriglia BaT at Lecce airport, ready to leave their parking area and take off for another mission over Albania. (AC)

reasons. In all, nine aircraft patrols of C.200s from 153° Gruppo accompanied the bombers from Puglia, and another confused air battle erupted over Klisura and Tepeleni in the afternoon. Also, 15 Gloster Gladiators from No.112 Squadron attacked five BR.20s from the 37° Stormo, which were bombing Greek troops on the Mali Trebescines, and soon after ten S.79s from the 105° Gruppo. At the end of the fight, the 105° Gruppo's gunners claimed four kills, while British pilots claimed eight. Actually, one Gloster Gladiator was shot down and four damaged, and two BR.20s and four S.79s were damaged.

This was the first of several similar clashes that during the next two weeks again gave rise to gross overclaims. On 11 March, during a fighter sweep, the 24° Gruppo lost two G.50s, with two more damaged, against the six kills plus one probable and seven damaged claimed by No.112 Squadron, while Italian pilots claimed a Gloster Gladiator and a Blenheim, having actually shot down a Greek Blenheim from 32 Mira but no British aircraft. On 13 March, the 160° Gruppo lost two CR.42s against one Gloster Gladiator and one Hurricane in a clash that had 18 CR.42s from 160° Gruppo and 11 C.200s from 22° Gruppo pitted against six Hurricanes from No.33 Squadron and 14 Gladiators from No 112 Squadron, on escort duties for some Blenheims targeted on Tepeleni. British pilots claimed no less than ten CR.42s, plus two probables and one damaged, and one G.50, plus one damaged. The following day, one Gloster Gladiator from No.112 Squadron and one Hurricane from No.33 Squadron were shot down when 16 C.200s from the 22° Gruppo and 12 CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo clashed with three Hurricanes and 12 Gloster Gladiators. This dogfight cost the RA two C.200s and two CR.42s against the six kills, plus six probables and one damaged, claimed by the RAF pilots. Italian pilots also reported four kills instead of the actual two.

While Italian bombers were pounding Greek positions, British bombers were raiding Elbasan, Devoli, Valona and Tirana, and in the early hours of 16 March, a Wellington from No.37 Squadron was lost to two CR.42s from the 160° Gruppo on night alert duty. When the Italian offensive stalled, the tempo of air operations gradually reduced due also to bad weather. On 22 March, 153° Gruppo's C.200s made two strafing attacks on Paramythia, destroying one Blenheim from No.211 Squadron, one Wellington from No.37 Squadron and one Gloster Gladiator. Paramythia was temporarily abandoned, but the following day the RAF retaliated, strafing and bombing Devoli, destroying one Ro.37bis and one G.50, and losing one Hurricane to ground fire, with two more damaged, together with a Bristol Blenheim, while the subsequent dogfight led to no losses on either side. On 26 March, 153° Gruppo's C.200s again strafed Paramythia, which was in use again, destroying another

The wreckage of a Bristol Blenheim of No.211 Squadron on the abandoned airfield at Paramythia. The aircraft was destroyed in a strafing attack by the C.200s of the 153° Gruppo CT on 22 March 1941, together with a Vickers Wellington and a Gloster Gladiator. (AC)

Gladiator, a Wellinton on the ground and a Gloster Gladiator in the air. Four days later, on 30 March, five G.50s from the 154° Gruppo were scrambled to intercept ten Blenheims from No.84 Squadron that had been dispatched without escort to raid Elbasan. The Italian fighters were guided via radio, quite a novelty for the RA, and two of the British bombers were badly shot up and erroneously claimed as kills.

The last raids

On the first day of April the 37° Gruppo BT moved to Aviano and the 73ª Squadriglia CT returned to Gorizia, in order to reinforce the 2ª Squadra Aerea for the imminent offensive against Yugoslavia. On 2 April, the new 101° Gruppo BaT, with the 208ª Squadriglia, redeployed from Lecce to Tirana absorbing the 238ª Squadriglia. The war was now a more complex affair and the RA was regrouping to face both Yugoslavia and Greece, while Germany was taking the main role. The last major engagements of the campaign are dated 2 April, when 14 CANT Z.1007bis bombed Florina and nine bombed Volos. One bomber from the 95° Gruppo, out of a patrol of five, went missing over Florina to ground fire, and two from the 106° Gruppo, out of a patrol of four, fell prey to British fighters after the raid on Volos. Then the centre of gravity switched to Yugoslavia. From 6 to 14 April, the bombing missions that were permitted by the weather were aimed at the Mostar airfield, the Cattaro (Kotor) naval base and the Yugoslav army movements. The Albanian front was again the main theatre of operation after 13 April, in support of the final advance on the heels of the withdrawing Greek Army, with the medium bombers attacking the lines of communication together with the Ju 87s and harassing the retreating columns. Two dive-bombers from the 101° Gruppo fell to ground fire on 14 and 15 April, over Perati and Doljana. Meanwhile the coastal sea lanes were also attacked and Capitano Giuseppe Cenni, commanding officer of the 239ª Squadriglia of the 97° Gruppo BaT, devised a skip-bombing technique that allowed his Ju 87s to sink the merchant vessel *Suzanna* (900 tons) and the torpedo-boat *Proussa* near Corfu on 4 April, and the merchant vessel *Ioanna* (1,200 tons) on 22 April. The last bombing raids were flown against Patras by four three-aircraft patrols from the 95° (one), the 106° (one) and the 107° (two) Gruppi. On the same day, following the surrender of Greece, all offensive operations were suspended. The last aircraft lost by the RA was a Ro.37bis from the 72° Gruppo OA, shot down by ground fire on 20 April. Pilot and observer bailed to safety.

ORDER OF BATTLE

ITALO-GREEK WAR, 6 April 1941

LUFTWAFFE
Luftflotte 4
4. (F) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 121 (6/4 Junkers Ju 88, 1/2 Messerschmitt Bf 110)
Stab Kampfgeschwader 2 (6 Dornier Do 17)
I./Kampfgeschwader 2 (28/1 Dornier Do 17)
III./Kampfgeschwader 2 (29/1 Dornier Do 17)
III./Kampfgeschwader 3 (26/5 Dornier Do 17 – Junkers Ju 88)
II./Kampfgeschwader 4 (25/3 Heinkel He 111)
Stab Kampfgeschwader 51 (1 Junkers Ju 88)
I./Kampfgeschwader 51 (17/12 Junkers Ju 88)
II./Kampfgeschwader 51 (18/10 Junkers Ju 88)
III./Kampfgeschwader 51 (19/4 Junkers Ju 88)

Fliegerführer Graz (Kommodore Stukageschwader 3)
Stab/Jagdgeschwader 54 (3 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
II./Jagdgeschwader 54 (1–3. Staffel) (24/8 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
I./Jagdgeschwader 27 (27/6 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
Stab/Stukageschwader 3 (1/2 Junkers Ju 87, 1 Heinkel He 111)
II./Stukageschwader 77 (34/5 Junkers Ju 87)

Fliegerführer Arad (Kommodore Stukageschwader 77)
III./Jagdgeschwader 54 (39/3 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
4. Staffel/Jagdgeschwader 54 (Messerschmitt Bf 109)
Stab/Jagdgeschwader 77 (6/1 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
II./Jagdgeschwader 77 (34/9 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
III./Jagdgeschwader 77 (33/9 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
I./Zerstörer Geschwader 26 (30/3 Messerschmitt Bf 110)
Stab/Stukageschwader 77 (3 Junkers Ju 87, 4/1 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
I./Stukageschwader 77 (33/6 Junkers Ju 87, 1 Messerschmitt Bf 110)
III./Stukageschwader 77 (32/8 Junkers Ju 87)

Kommandeur der Luftwaffe Armee Oberkommando 2
2. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 31
3. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 13
4. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 13
3. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 21 Pz
3. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 41 Pz
3. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 12 Pz
2. (H) Staffel/Aufklärungsgruppe 32 Pz

VIII. Fliegerkorps
2. (F) Staffel/Aufklärungsstaffel 11 (11/1 Dornier Do 17)
Stab/Jagdgeschwader 27 (5 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
II./Jagdgeschwader 27 (37/3 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
III./Jagdgeschwader 27 (39/1 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
I.(Jäger)/Lehrgeschwader 2 (22/5 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
II./Zerstörer Geschwader 26 (25/12 Messerschmitt Bf 110)
I./Stukageschwader 1 (1/1 Junkers Ju 87)
Stab/Stukageschwader 2 (4 Junkers Ju 87, 6 Dornier Do 17)
I./Stukageschwader 2 (39 Junkers Ju 87)
III./Stukageschwader 2 (35/3 Junkers Ju 87)
I./Stukageschwader 3 (39 Junkers Ju 87)
I.(Kampf)/Lehrgeschwader 1 (Junkers Ju 88)
II. (Schlacht)/Lehrgeschwader 2 (23/6 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
7. Staffel/Lehrgeschwader 2 (Messerschmitt Bf 110)
10. Staffel/Lehrgeschwader 2 (20/12 Henschel Hs 123)
7. Seenotdienststaffel
IV./Kampfgruppe z.b.V. 1 (Junkers Ju 52)

Note: aircraft numbers show available/serviceable

REGIA AERONAUTICA
Comando Aeronautica Albania (Tirana)
22° Gruppo Autonomo CT (37 Macchi C.200)
359ª Squadriglia
362ª Squadriglia
369ª Squadriglia

24° Gruppo Autonomo CT (26 FIAT G.50)
354ª Squadriglia
355ª Squadriglia
369ª Squadriglia

150° Gruppo Autonomo CT (20 Macchi C.200)
363ª Squadriglia
371ª Squadriglia

154° Gruppo Autonomo CT (23 FIAT G.50)
361ª Squadriglia
395ª Squadriglia

160° Gruppo Autonomo CT (22 FIAT CR.42)
375ª Squadriglia
393ª Squadriglia
394ª Squadriglia

101° Gruppo Autonomo BaT (20 Junkers Ju 87)
208ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)
238ª Squadriglia BaT (Junkers Ju 87)

72° Gruppo Autonomo OA
25ª Squadriglia (9 IMAM Ro.37bis)
42ª Squadriglia (9 IMAM Ro.37bis)
120ª Squadriglia (9 IMAM Ro.37bis)
5° Gruppo Autonomo OA
31ª Squadriglia (4 IMAM Ro.37bis)
39ª Squadriglia (6 IMAM Ro.37bis)

4ª Squadra Aerea
153° Gruppo Autonomo CT (40 Macchi C.200, 7 FIAT CR.42, 1 FIAT CR.32)
370ª Squadriglia
372ª Squadriglia
373ª Squadriglia
374ª Squadriglia

8° Gruppo Autonomo CT (from 13 April, transferring from 2ª Squadra Aerea with 14 Macchi C.200)
92ª Squadriglia
94ª Squadriglia

356ª Squadriglia Autonoma CT (from 12 April, with 9 Macchi C.200 and 2 FIAT CR.42)

13° Stormo BT (from 10 April, transferring from 2ª Squadra Aerea with 28 FIAT BR.20)
11° Gruppo
1ª Squadriglia
4ª Squadriglia
43° Gruppo BT
3ª Squadriglia
5ª Squadriglia

37° Stormo BT (26 FIAT BR.20, 2 Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
55° Gruppo
220ª Squadriglia
221ª Squadriglia
116° Gruppo
276ª Squadriglia
277ª Squadriglia

38° Stormo BT (9 FIAT BR.20)
39° Gruppo
51ª Squadriglia
69ª Squadriglia
40° Gruppo
202ª Squadriglia
203ª Squadriglia
35° Stormo BT/BM
86° Gruppo BM (12 CANT Z.506B)
190ª Squadriglia
191ª Squadriglia
95° Gruppo BT (15 CANT Z.1007bis)
230ª Squadriglia
231ª Squadriglia

47° Stormo BT (22 (CANT Z.1007bis))
106° Gruppo
260ª Squadriglia
261ª Squadriglia
107° Gruppo BT
262ª Squadriglia BT
263ª Squadriglia BT

50° Gruppo Autonomo BT (11 (CANT Z.1007bis))
210ª Squadriglia
211ª Squadriglia

104° Gruppo Autonomo BT (7 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
252ª Squadriglia
253ª Squadriglia

105° Gruppo Autonomo BT (14 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
254ª Squadriglia
255ª Squadriglia

97° Gruppo Autonomo BaT (16 Junkers Ju 87)
209ª Squadriglia
239ª Squadriglia (on 10 April transferred to 2ª Squadra Aerea)

279ª Squadriglia AS (Aerosiluranti, torpedo bombers, from 7 April with 5 S.79)

2ª Squadra Aerea
4° Stormo CT (34 Macchi C.200)
9° Gruppo
73ª Squadriglia
96ª Squadriglia
97ª Squadriglia
10° Gruppo
84ª Squadriglia
90ª Squadriglia
91ª Squadriglia

54° Stormo CT (29 Macchi C.200)
7° Gruppo
78ª Squadriglia
86ª Squadriglia

98ª Squadriglia
16° Gruppo
167ª Squadriglia
168ª Squadriglia
169ª Squadriglia

Falconara Fighter Section (4 Macchi C.200)
Night Fighter Sections at Treviso, Bologna, Gorizia, Padoa (12 FIAT CR.42)
18° Stormo BT (32 FIAT BR.20)
31° Gruppo
65ª Squadriglia
66ª Squadriglia
37° Gruppo
47ª Squadriglia
48ª Squadriglia

99° Gruppo BT (14 FIAT BR.20)
242ª Squadriglia
243ª Squadriglia

239ª Squadriglia BaT (from 10 April, transferred from 4ª Squadra Aerea with 9 Ju 87)
61° Gruppo Autonomo OA
34ª Squadriglia (8 Caproni Ca.311)
36ª Squadriglia (8 IMAM Ro.37bis)

63° Gruppo Autonomo OA (14 IMAM Ro.37bis)
41ª Squadriglia
113ª Squadriglia

71° Gruppo Autonomo OA
38ª Squadriglia OA (12 IMAM Ro.37bis)
116ª Squadriglia (=)
128ª Squadriglia (7 Caproni Ca.311)

Comando Aeronautica dell'Egeo
161ª Squadriglia Autonoma CM (4 IMAM Ro.44, 1 IMAM Ro.43)
162ª Squadriglia Autonoma CT (9 FIAT CR.42)
163ª Squadriglia Autonoma CT (3 FIAT CR.42, 4 FIAT CR.32)

39° Stormo BT
56° Gruppo (7 Savoia-Marchetti S.81)
222ª Squadriglia
223ª Squadriglia
92° Gruppo (2 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
200ª Squadriglia
201ª Squadriglia

34° Gruppo Autonomo BT/AS (5 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
67ª Squadriglia
68ª Squadriglia

84° Gruppo RM (5 CANT Z.501, 1 CANT Z.506B)
147ª Squadriglia
185ª Squadriglia

281a Squadriglia AS (3 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
172a Squadriglia RS (Ricognizione Strategica, with 1 (CANT Z.1007bis))
Sezione Soccorso (1 CANT Z.506)

Note: the number of aircraft given for the RA units is the number of aircraft combat-ready at the specified date

Royal Yugoslav Air Force
Air Force Staff
701 Eskadrila VZ (Messerschmitt Bf 108, Fieseler Fi 56)
11. Ind. Recce Grupa (9 Blenheim Mk I, 2 Hind)
21. Eskadrila
22. Eskadrila

81. Bomber Grupa (14 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
261. Eskadrila
262. Eskadrila

Independent Fighter Eskadrila (3 Hurricane I, 3 Messerschmitt Bf 109, 3 Avia BH-33)
1 Lovacka Vazduhoplovna Brigada (Fighter Air Brigade)
702. Eskadrila VZ (Messerschmitt Bf 108, Fieseler Fi 56, 2 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
2 (Fighter) Puk
31. Grupa (19 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
101. Eskadrila
141. Eskadrila
52. Grupa (15 Hurricane I)
163. Eskadrila
164. Eskadrila

6 (Fighter) Puk
32. Grupa (27 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
103. Eskadrila
104. Eskadrila
142. Eskadrila
51. Grupa
102. Eskadrila (10 Messerschmitt Bf 109)
161. Eskadrila (3 IK-Z)
162. Eskadrila (3 IK-Z)

2 Mesovita Vazduhoplovna Brigada (Mixed Air Brigade)

703. Eskadrila VZ (Messerschmitt Bf 108, Fieseler Fi 56)
4 (Fighter) Puk
33. Grupa
105. Eskadrila (7 Hurricane Mk I)
106. Eskadrila (6 Hurricane Mk I)
34. Grupa
107. Eskadrila (8 IK-2)
108. Eskadrila (7 Hurricane Mk I)

8 (Bomber) Puk
68. Grupa
215. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)
216. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)
69. Grupa
217. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)
218. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)

3 Mesovita Vazduhoplovna Brigada (Mixed Air Brigade)
704. Eskadrila VZ (Messerschmitt Bf 108, Fieseler Fi 56)

3 (Bomber) Puk (30 Dornier Do 17K)
63. Grupa
205. Eskadrila
206. Eskadrila
207. Eskadrila
64. Grupa
208. Eskadrila
210. Eskadrila
209. Eskadrila

5 (Fighter) Puk
35. Grupa (15 Hawker Fury)
109. Eskadrila
110. Eskadrila
36. Grupa (15 Hawker Fury)
111. Eskadrila
112. Eskadrila
4 Bombardeska Vazduhoplovna Brigada (Bomber Air Brigade)
705 Eskadrila VZ (Messerschmitt Bf 108, Fieseler Fi 56)
1 (Bomber) Puk
61. Grupa
201. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)
202. Eskadrila (5 Blenheim Mk I)
62. Grupa
203. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)
204. Eskadrila (6 Blenheim Mk I)

7 (Bomber) Puk
66. Grupa (13 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
211. Eskadrila
212. Eskadrila
67. Grupa (13 Savoia-Marchetti S.79)
213. Eskadrila
214. Eskadrila

Army Aviation (Air Reconnaissance)
1 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (15 aircraft)
2 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (16 aircraft)
3 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (19 aircraft)
4 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (18 aircraft)
5 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (14 aircraft)
6 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (16 aircraft)
7 VI Grupa (Army Aviation) (18 aircraft)
Samostalna Izvidjacka Eskadrila (Coastal Army Command) (4 aircraft)

Navy Aviation (Air Reconnaissance)
2 Hidroplanska Komanda
3 Hidrogrupa
5 Hidroeskadrila (5 SIM-XIV, 1 SM)
25 Hidroeskadrila (6 Do 22)
4 Hidrogrupa
26 Hidroeskadrila (5 Do Wal)
15 Hidroeskadrila (2 SIM-XIV)

3 Hidroplanska Komanda
1 Hidrogrupa
1 Hidroeskadrila (5 SIM-XIV)
11 Hidroeskadrila (3 SIM-XIV)
2 Hidrogrupa
20 Hidroeskadrila (6 Do 22)
21 Hidroeskadrila (6 Do Wal)

SH Eskadrila (training)
Note: number of aircraft shown refers to the available ones

Royal Hellenic Air Force
21 Mira Dioxes (Gladiator)
22 Mira Dioxes (PZL P.24)
23 Mira Dioxes (PZL P.24)
24 Mira Dioxes (Bloch MB 151)

31 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants, Potez 63)
32 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants, Blenheim Mk IV)
33 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants, Fairey Battles)

11 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (remnants, Fairey III F)
12 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (remnants, Dornier Do 22)
13 Mira Naftkis Synergassias (remnants, Avro Anson)

Royal Air Force (*Barbarity*)
No.30 Bomber/Fighter Squadron (Blenheim Mk I F)
No.33 Fighter Squadron (Hurricane Mk I)
No.80 Fighter Squadron (Hurricane Mk I)
No.112 Fighter Squadron (Gloster Gladiator)

No.11 Bomber Squadron (Blenheim Mk I)
No.84 Bomber Squadron (Blenheim Mk I)
No.113 Bomber Squadron RAF (Blenheim Mk I)
No.211 Bomber Squadron RAF (Blenheim Mk I)
No.37 Bomber Squadron RAF (Wellington Mk Ic)

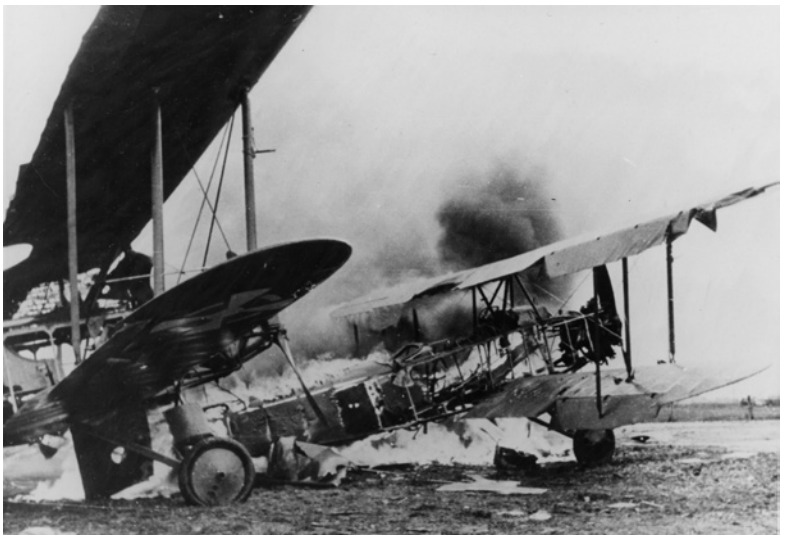
No.208 Air Co-operation Squadron (Lysander, Hurricane Mk I)
No.230 Seaplane Squadron (Sunderland) (detachment)

Fleet Air Arm
No.805 Fighter Squadron (Fulmar, Sea Gladiator)
No.815 Torpedo Squadron (Swordfish)

The 1941 campaign in the Balkans: the war against Yugoslavia

At 0645hrs on 6 April 1941, a force of 160 Heinkel He 111s and Dornier Do 17s from II./KG 4 and from KG 2 and KG 3 attacked Belgrade. They were supported by 74 Junkers Ju 87s from StG 77 and protected 20 Messerschmitt Bf 110s and 100 Messerschmitt Bf 109s. They met Yugoslav anti-aircraft fire and the reaction of the five IK-2s of 51. Grupa and the 29 Bf 109Es of 32. Grupa (1. Puk, fighter regiment). The second wave came at 1000hrs, with 57 Ju 87s escorted by 30 Bf 109s, which were attacked by the Bf 109s of 51. Grupa. Two other German attacks came in the afternoon, the first at 1400hrs with 94 bombers escorted by 60 fighters, the second at 1600hrs with 90 Ju 87s escorted by 60 fighters. Once again, 51. and 32. Grupa reacted, facing severe losses. At the end of the day, the Luftwaffe (JG 77, III./JG 54 and I./ZG 26) claimed 19 enemy Bf 109s shot down along with four unidentified aircraft. The claims are consistent with the actual losses of 6. Puk, ten aircraft destroyed and 15 damaged with five pilots killed and seven wounded. German losses over Belgrade included two Ju 87s from III./StG 77, with two more from II./StG 77 lost in north-central Yugoslavia, two Do 17s from 8./KG 3, one Ju 88 from I./KG 51, with three more damaged, as well as one Do 17 from 8./KG 51. Fighter losses were more substantial, II./JG 77 losing one Bf 109 over Belgrade, while I./JG 27, Stab/JG 54 and III./JG 54 also lost one Bf 109 each and a Bf 109 from I./JG 27 was damaged in an accident. I./ZG 26 suffered heavier losses with five Messerschmitt Bf 110s either shot down by anti-aircraft fire or crash-landing, with another one damaged. The Luftwaffe bombed Belgrade again at 2300hrs on 6 April, 484 bombers and dive-bombers dropping 360 tons of bombs on the already-burning city until 0400hrs.

'Black 10', a Messerschmitt Bf 109 E1 from 9. Staffel, Jagdgeschwader 77, piloted by Unteroffizier Fritz Borchert, which crash-landed at Larissa on 20 April 1941 after being shot down by Squadron Leader 'Pat' Pattle. The pilot was captured. The symbol close to the tail is the fighters' marking for the III Gruppe of a Jagdgeschwader.(WC)



The effects of the Luftwaffe's strike against Yugoslav airfields: two Zmaj Fizir FN initial trainers in flames after being strafed. Most of the Yugoslav Air Force trainers and mostly obsolete ground support and reconnaissance aircraft were lost this way in the early days of the Axis invasion. (NARA)

The Velika Gorica airfield near Zagreb was also attacked on the first day of the campaign, resulting in the destruction of 18 Breguet XIXs and some Potez 25s from 4. (Reconnaissance) Grupa. A similar fate was also suffered by the 6. (Reconnaissance) Grupa on the airfield near Brezice, close to Zagreb, II/StG 77 claiming eight enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground. The only loss was a Bf 109. The Yugoslav reaction was limited. Two pairs of Blenheim Mk Is from 62. (Bomber) Grupa at Bijeljina carried out an armed reconnaissance towards the Romanian border without finding any targets; a number of Blenheim Mk Is from 216. Eskadrila of 68. (Bomber) Grupa at Rovine attacked Graz and Wiener Neustadt airfields, in Austria, losing one of their number; two pairs of Blenheims from the 11. (Long Range Reconnaissance) Grupa at Ruma–Veliki Radinci tried to bomb Arad and Timisoara, all but one being lost. The pair of Blenheims attacking Arad were shot down by the Bf 109s of III./JG 54. This 'Gruppe' was particularly successful on 7 April, first with the 4./JG 54 shooting down four JKRV Bf 109s during a Ju 87 escorting mission, then with the 5./JG 54 claiming six Blenheims out of a larger formation bound for Hungary. Still on 6 April, one Hurricane was disposed of by 6./JG 54 and three more by III./JG 54. In the meantime, from their bases in Italy, X. Fliegerkorps bombers attacked the airfields at Podgorica and Mostar, the escorting Bf 110s from III./ZG 26 clashing with some S.79s from 81. Grupa, from Mostar. There were two S.79s shot down and three were damaged. The Ju 88s of KG 54 attacked Novi Sad, Banja Luka, Mostar and Dubrovnik, losing one aircraft and claiming one Hurricane shot down. On 6 April, the JKRV flew more than 470 sorties (the total number, including the reconnaissance aicraft, is hard to ascertain), 377 fighter sorties and 93 bomber sorties, reporting the loss of 47 fighters, 45 bombers and 53 reconnaissance aircraft.

On 7 April, the bombers from 1, and 3. Puk flew some 60 sorties against the German advancing columns with their Blenheims (1. Puk, 61. and 62. Grupa) and Do 17Ks (3. Puk, 63. and 64. Grupa), 1. Puk losing four aircraft while 3. Puk had three Do 17Ks destroyed on the ground at Petrovac and Pristina. The dispersal of JKRV units made it difficult to conduct counter-air strikes, nevertheless the airfields at Lazarevac, Smederevska Palanka and Topolje were heavily hit by the Luftwaffe resulting in some 50 aircraft, mostly trainers and ground support machines, being destroyed on the ground. In the meantime, after a series of small-size attacks, Belgrade was bombed again at 1600hrs on 7 April by 24 bombers and 26 dive-bombers escorted by fighters. The Yugoslav reaction saw an IK-3 and Bf 109E from 51. Grupa claiming one Bf 110 and three Ju 87s, but the 51. Grupa patrol was mauled by the Bf 109s of 4./JG 54 which claimed eight out of the nine Yugoslav Bf 109Es. The JKRV tried again to strike at the Luftwaffe's airfields, one of the three Blenheims from 8. Puk (68. and 69. Grupa) that reached Austria being shot down by flak, while the 14 Blenheims, eight from 68. Grupa and six from 69. Grupa, that attacked targets in Hungary lost 13 of their number to fighters and flak, 5./JG 54 claiming six.

On 7 April the Luftwaffe lost three Bf 109s of III./JG 54 destroyed in accidents, one Bf 110 of II./ZG 26 crash-landed, two Ju 87s of I./StG 77 destroyed in a mid-air collision

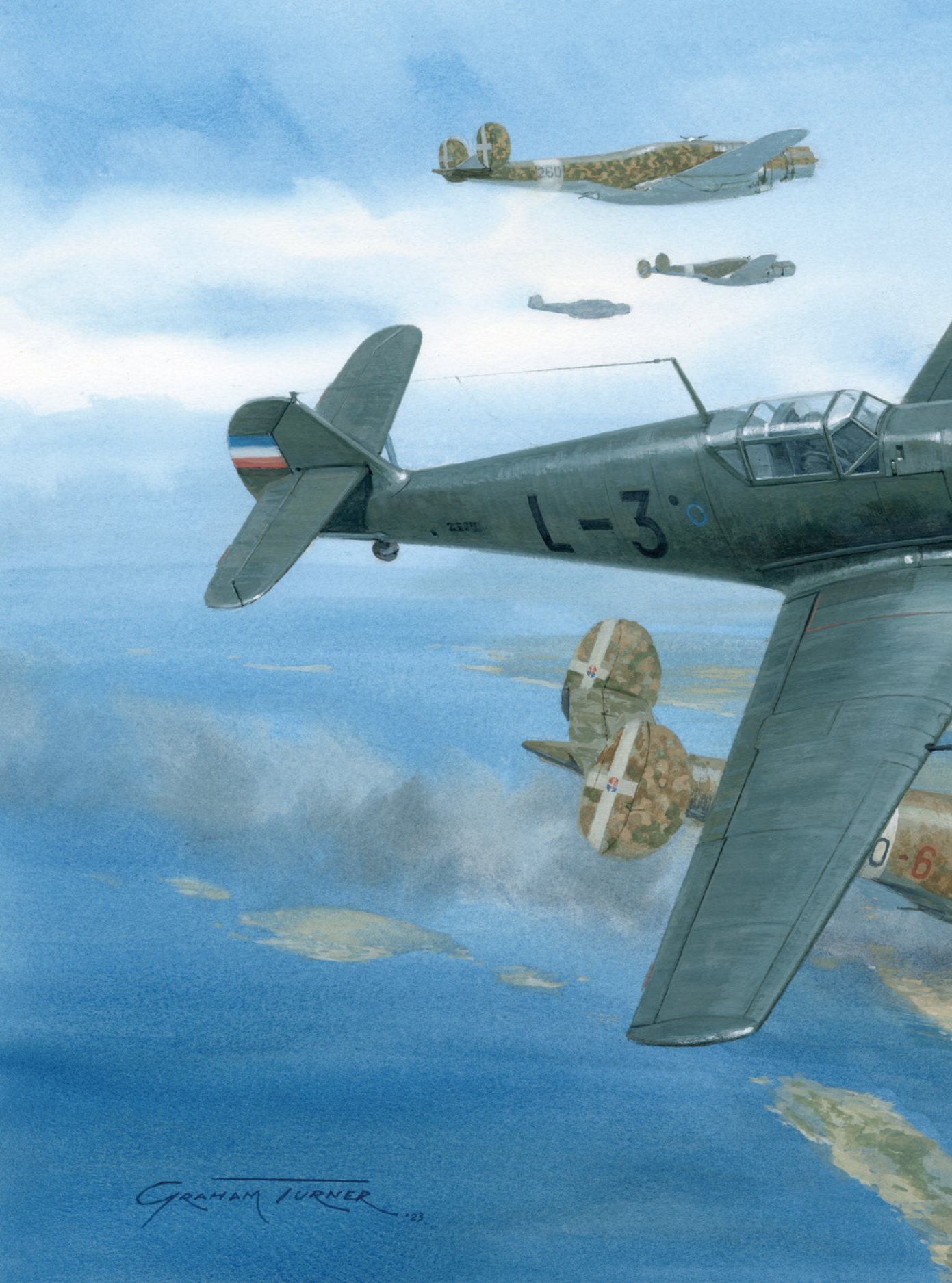
and one damaged in combat. Two Do 17s of KG 2 were also lost, one over Belgrade, and KG 51 lost six Ju 88s (four from I./KG 51, one each from II. and III./KG 51), four of them due to enemy action while bombing Belgrade. Meanwhile the JKRV had been practically wiped out of the sky, its fighters being scarcely active from 7 April. The Luftwaffe lost only four aircraft on 8 April, all destroyed in accidents, including two Bf 110s from II./ZG 26.

The surviving records of III./KG 51 clearly show the decreasing level of JKRV activity, along with the freedom of action gained by the Luftwaffe, which modified its pattern of operation according to the situation on the ground. At 0820hrs on 6 April, the Gruppe attacked Belgrade with 16 Ju 88s (15 on target), two of which were hit by anti-aircraft fire. A second attack followed at 1650hrs on the same day with nine Ju 88s again finding only light anti-aircraft fire. The Gruppe bombed Belgrade again at 1555hrs on 7 April, eight Ju 88s dropping bombs and being attacked by a Yugoslav Bf 109. As a result, one Ju 88 was damaged and had to crash-land at Arad. Four days later III./KG 51 returned to action, with 14 Ju 88s attacking Belgrade, Novi Sad, Banja Luka, Bosanska Gradiska and Brod by day. No anti-aircraft fire was encountered and only two Yugoslav fighters were spotted, but did not attack. On the next day, III./KG 51 sent 19 Ju 88s to bomb the Mostar airfield at 1000hrs, again facing no anti-aircraft fire. One Yugoslav fighter attacked, and was shot down. On that same day Mostar's train station was also attacked at 1645hrs by 15 Ju 88s, this time facing no enemy reaction at all. On 13 April, 14 Ju 88s bombed Sarajevo, being welcomed by light but more effective anti-aircraft fire. Two other missions, with respectively seven and eight Ju 88s, were flown on that same day against railway yards and Mostar airfield, which was attacked again on the next day by 15 Ju 88s, which dropped 15,750kg of bombs from a range of altitudes from 2,000 to 4,000m. On 14 April, a Yugoslav troop concentration was also attacked, this time with 13 Ju 88s dropping 12,000kg of bombs on the intended area, only to discover there were no enemy troops, contrary to the reports by reconnaissance. Two more attacks were carried out on 15 April, five Ju 88s bombing Dubrovnik harbour and three Fort'Opus (Opuzen). Overall III./KG 51 flew 14 missions and 148 sorties dropping a total of 154,200kg of bombs, with the loss of a single Ju 88 due to enemy action and three more being damaged.

On 10 April, the German troops entered Zagreb, Belgrade being occupied two days later. III./JG 54 was the first unit to redeploy, from Arad to Pancevo, near Belgrade. The remnants of JKRV also redeployed, but to the central part of the country, with 6. and 4. Puk. concentrating at Veliki Radinci and Kragujevac, where the 31. Grupa also redeployed.

The Yugoslav air force strikes back, 6 April 1941

The reaction of the Royal Yugoslav Air Force (JKRV) to the attacks from the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica on the first day of the invasion by the combined forces of the Axis powers was limited, but not ineffective. Since 0630hrs, the coastal city of Spalato (Split), the naval base at Cattaro (Kotor) and the major airport at Mostar Ortijes, home of 66. and 81. (Bomber) Grupa, had been attacked by the X. Fliegerkorps and the 4ª Squadra Aerea. The JKRV had the Independent Fighter Eskadrila of Kapetan Mihailo Grbic at Kosor, a small airfield south of Mostar, with three Hurricane Mk Is, three Messerschmitt Bf 109Es and three Avia BH-33s, two of which were detached at Podgorica. Early in the morning, at 0735hrs, 15 CANT Z.1007bis from 47° Stormo (106° and 107° Gruppo) bombed the main airfield at Mostar Ortijes, fending off the attacks of a Bf 109E and a Blenheim, and suffering damage to one of them. Then, at 1440hrs, five CANT Z.1007bis from the 106° Gruppo (260ª and 261ª Squadriglia), led by Capitano Bernardo Quattro Ciocchi, bombed Mostar airport, followed five minutes later by five aircraft from the 263ª Squadriglia (107° Gruppo), led by Tenente Colonnello Gori Castellani. Soon after the two patrols had delivered their bombloads on the airfield, hitting the hangars and the buildings, they were attacked by two Bf 109s and two Hurricanes of the Independent Fighter Eskadrila. Sergeant Grujic, flying a Bf 109, managed to shoot down one aircraft from 106° Gruppo flown by Sottotenente Giovanni Della Costa over the Peljesac peninsula, and two more CANT Z.1007bis were damaged, one from each patrol, with two airmen wounded. The Italian bombers, without fighter support, fired back with their guns and the 263ª Squadriglia claimed two Yugoslav Messerschmitts shot down. These claims could not be verified, but the Independent Fighter Eskadrila suffered the loss of two of its Bf 109s to the Messerschmitt Bf 110s of III./ZG 26 during the course of the day.


L-3
GRAHAM TURNER '23

The most famous event related to the 1940–41 air campaign in the Balkans: the German bombing of Belgrade on 6 April 1941 as reported by *Der Adler* magazine. In fact, Belgrade was bombed several times between 6 and 7 April suffering heavy damage and loss of life. (Wikimedia Commons/ Orjen/CC-BY-SA)

Kragujevac was flooded due to heavy rain but the JKRV now had to face a new enemy: the newly born Croatian State. Other than the Germans and the Italians, the JKRV was now supposed to attack rebellious Croatian units as well, but news of the approaching German columns resulted in plans to burn down the last aircraft. Bad weather did not have the same effect on the Luftwaffe. On 9 April, three Staffeln from III./JG 54 engaged in a dogfight over Rovine with the IK-2s of 107. Eskadrila, joined by the Hurricanes of 106. and 108. Eskadrila. Three Yugoslav fighters were shot down, against two German ones. This was the last major engagement of the JKRV before its disintegration. On 10 April both 163. and 164. Eskadrila lost almost all their Hurricanes at Knic, bogged down in the muddy airfield and burned to prevent their capture. The remaining units flew to the Sarajevo area, which was attacked by the KG 54 bombers in order to prevent the creation of a Yugoslav redoubt. The same fate was suffered by the Blenheims of 11. Grupa, the JKRV being now down to half a dozen serviceable Blenheims of the 8. Puk, six Hurricanes and four or five IK-2s of the 34. Grupa (4. Puk) and 10–11 Do 17s of 64. Grupa (3. Puk). On 13 April, the order was given to destroy them due to the Germans approaching. On 14–15 April the airfields in the Mostar area were attacked again, and on 15 April Bijeljina airfield was captured by the troops carried by 17 Junkers Ju 52s which landed undisturbed. On the same day, with the negotiations with the Germans about to start, the Chief of the General Staff, General Dusan Simovic (Armijski đeneral Dušan Simović), delivered the order not to fire against enemy aircraft. Meanwhile, a 'ferry' connection with Greece was established to open an escape route that stayed even after the surrender was signed on 17 April.

Junkers Ju 88 of Lehrgeschwader 1 probably at the Bulgarian airfield of Plovdiv. Perhaps the most active German bomber unit during the campaign, the LG 1 was first and foremost in the anti-shipping campaign in spite of the fact that, due to lack of space on the airfield, it could not be moved to Salonika. (Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe)

German losses were minimal. On 12 April, three Ju 88s of II and III./KG 51 were damaged, two by machine-gun fire, while the anti-aircraft artillery shot down a Ju 88 of II./KG 51 on 13 April and two from II./KG 51 on 14 April. The single Bf 109 of III./JG 54 lost over Pancevo on 17 April can be considered the last loss of the

A pair of S.79s of the 255ª Squadriglia (105° Gruppo, 46° Stormo BT) during a bombing mission. For a time, Italian bombers performed their tactical support duties in two or three aircraft patrols. The S.79 was armed with three 12.7mm machine guns (one forward firing, one in the distinctive dorsal position with a ±30° traverse sector, one rear firing in the ventral 'gondola' bay) and two waist 7.7mm machine guns, one on each side.(AC)

campaign. JKRV had suffered much more: 49 aircraft were lost due to enemy action, with 27 fighter pilots and 76 bomber aircrew, six were shot down by friendly fire, 85 were destroyed on the ground. Some 40 to 50 aircraft fled to Greece, and at least two Hurricanes, two Hawker Furys, one Do 17K, eight SIM-XIV-Hs and one S.79 were captured intact.

The Regia Aeronautica against Yugoslavia

On 6 April the Comando Aeronautica Albania maintained a defensive attitude, with the fighter squadrons flying combat air patrols to stop possible raids from Yugoslavia and Greece. Furthermore, in order to disrupt offensives from Montenegro, nine Ju 87s from the 208ª Squadriglia destroyed a bridge south of Podgorica on the road to Scutari. On 9 April a Ro.37bis was lost to ground fire over Okrida but adverse weather prevented any offensives until 12 April, when 18 Ju 87s from the 101° Gruppo in the morning, and nine in the afternoon, again attacked the roads north of the border and the Yugoslav Army columns that were moving south from Podgorica. The following day, nine Ju 87s from the same squadron dive-bombed the airfield of Mostar, losing one of their number to ground fire. It was the last offensive action of the Comando Aeronautica Albania against Yugoslavia.

The 4ª Squadra Aerea had a much more significant involvement in the war against Yugoslavia, even if limited to the same time span. On 6 April, the 47° Stormo sent 15 CANT Z.1007bis over the airfield at Mostar in the morning and ten in the afternoon, hitting the landing ground and the buildings. One bomber from the morning wave, and one from the afternoon wave, were damaged by anti-aircraft artillery, and on the way back to Grottaglie the afternoon wave was engaged by two Bf 109Es and by two Hurricanes. One CANT Z.1007bis was shot down and a second one was damaged, landing at its base with two wounded aboard. The Italian gunners claimed two Bf 109s shot down. On the same day, five CANT Z.1007bis from the 35° Stormo bombed the harbour of Spalato (Split), ten more from the same unit, 15 from the 50° Gruppo and nine Ju 87s from 101° Gruppo bombed the naval facilities and the ships at Cattaro (Kotor) and Teodo (Tivat). One Ju 87 was hit by ground fire and crashed west of Cattaro, and two more were damaged. Due to the weather, offensive operations were resumed only on 13 April, with 105 CANT Z.1007bis and BR.20s bombing naval targets in the area of Cattaro, five BR.20s from the 37° Stormo bombing Podgorica, eight S.79s from 104° Gruppo bombing military barracks south of Coritza, fending off the attack of eight Gloster Gladiators from No.112 Squadron, two of them being claimed as

A two-seater biplane Ro.37bis of the 41° Squadriglia OA that supported the advance of 2nd Army through Slovenia and Croatia. The *squadriglie OA* (air observation squadrons) were under the operational control of the army and were used for tactical reconnaissance and ground attack missions very much like the corps squadrons of World War One. (AC)

shot down. The following day, the 50° Gruppo BT departed to Rhodes and the 4ª Squadra Aerea turned again towards Greece.

As far as the 2ª Squadra Aerea was concerned, bad weather hindered all offensive operations till 8 April, when ten BR.20s from the 18° Stormo, from Aviano, bombed the railway station of Sebenico (Sibenik), five bombed the seaplane station of Divulje, west of Spalato, and 15 dropped bombs over ships moored in the river Krka, near Zaton, north-west of Sebenico. Four aircraft were slightly damaged by ground fire with two airmen wounded. More bombing missions were conducted by the RA the following day on Zaton, by ten BR.20s from the 18° Stormo, and on Bencovazzo (Bencovac), where enemy troops had been located; by ten BR.20s from 99° Gruppo; while ten C.200s from the 4° Stormo strafed the seaplane station at Slosella, damaging four aircraft. Bencovazzo, Divulje and the naval station at Mandalina, just south of Sebenico, were targeted again on 10 and 11 April by the 18° Stormo and the 99° Gruppo with ten-aircraft-strong patrols, while several fighter patrols carried out strafing missions in the same area. Also on 11 April, seven Ju 87s from the 239ª Squadriglia, from Jesi, dive-bombed three torpedo-boats in the Krka River and just off the peninsula of Mandalina and 12 BR.20s from 99° Gruppo bombed the island of Uglian, south-west of Zara (Zadar), while on 12 April 12 BR.20s from the 99° Gruppo attacked troops in the area of Bencovazzo, ten BR.20s from the 18° Stormo bombed the peninsula of Mandalina and seven Ju 87s from the 239ª Suadriglia dive-bombed the harbour facilities and some warships at Sebenico, losing two aircraft to ground fire. The campaign was quickly coming to an end, as the air reconnaissance was able to confirm while covering the advancing 2nd Army, and the last relevant bombing missions against Yugoslavia were performed on 13 April, when ten BR.20s from the 18° Stormo and ten from the 25° Gruppo, from Forlì, bombed Sebenico again. A cloudy sky was a disturbing factor during most missions in this short campaign and caused significant error during the only bombing raid of 14 April, with ten BR.20s from 25° Gruppo dropping their bombload on Drnis (Dernis) instead of Knin (Tenin), some 24km farther north. Hostilities with Yugoslavia ceased the next day.

VIII. Fliegerkorps' early operations

The German attack against Greece started in a similar way to that against Yugoslavia, with a destructive air raid on the capital city. Its harbour, in fact. On the evening of 6 April, 20 Ju 88s

from III./KG 30, followed by 11 He 111s from 2./KG 4, took off from their airfields in Sicily to bomb the overcrowded Piraeus harbour. After a long-distance flight in bad weather, at 2035hrs the German raiders hit the 7,529-ton freighter *Clan Fraser* which, still laden with 750 tons of explosives, exploded, hitting other nearby ships, including the 7,100-ton *City of Roubaix*. The huge explosion, heard from a distance of almost 250km, damaged large portions of the Piraeus docks and structures as well as sinking 11 merchant vessels (plus other smaller ones) to a total of 41,789 tons. Three of them were British, one Maltese, and the rest Greek.

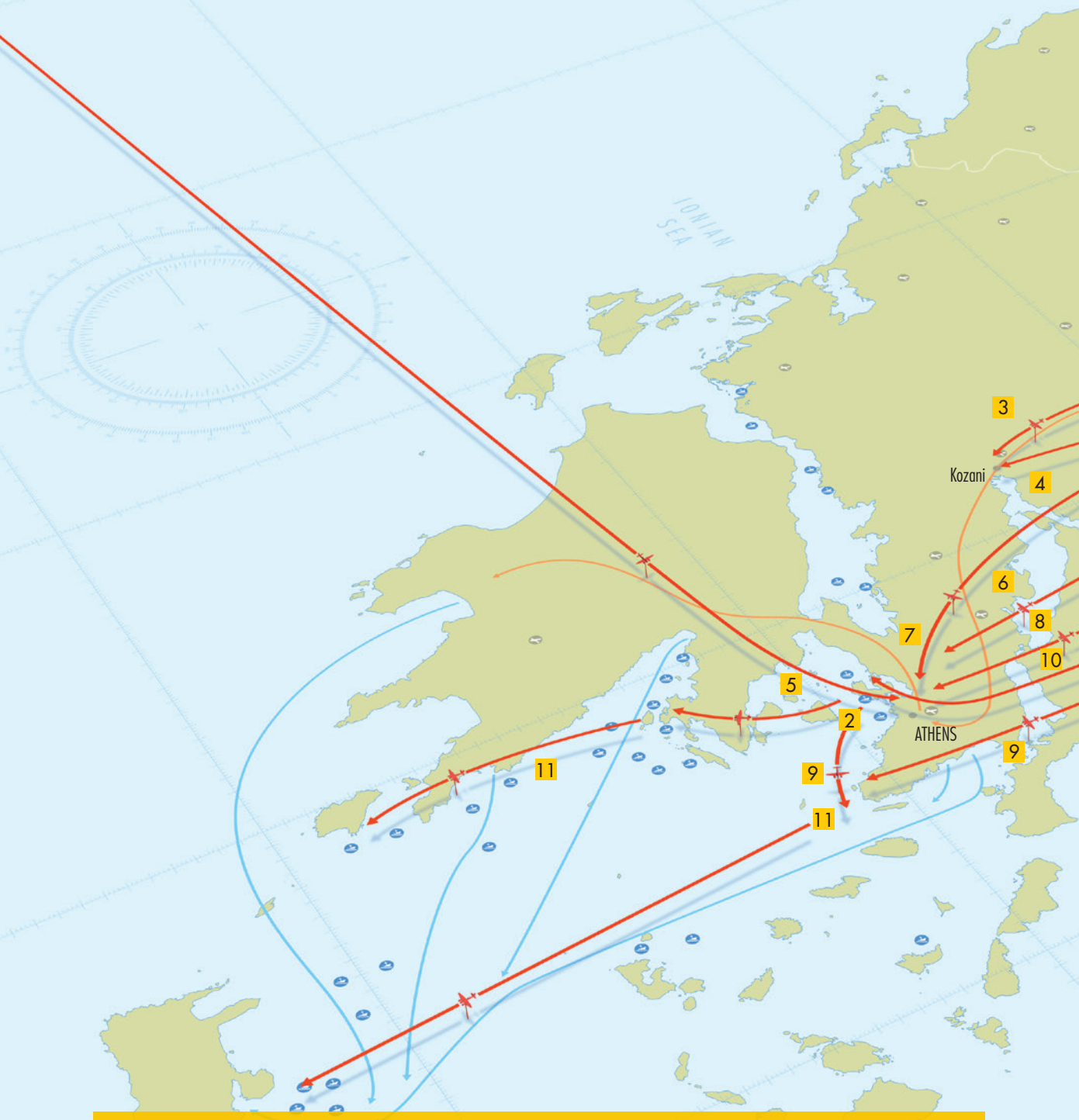
A flight of Junkers Ju 88 enroute to the target. The Ju 88 was the most modern German bomber available in April 1941 attached to KG 3 and 51, also Lehrgeschwader 1. Being mostly used in the anti-shipping campaign, they were moved forward to newly seized airfields along with fighter and ground attack units. (Getty)

The VIII. Fliegerkorps' attacks were equally heavy, albeit without the same effect. Since dawn on 6 April, the Ju 87s of StG 2, supported by the Bf 109s and Hs 123s of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, attacked the Greek defences at Rupel Pass and all the nearby roads while, on the ground, Flak Regiment 99 supported the attack with its 88mm guns. The Stukas hit the Greek fortifications several times during that day and in the days that followed, even dropping 1,000kg bombs. Only after the surrender of the Greek defenders, which came after the seizure of Salonika, were they to discover that the effect of the air attacks amounted to nothing. The bunkers, built inside the mountains, proved much better than those of the French Maginot Line and did not suffer any real damage.

While supporting the attack against the Metaxas Line, the VIII. Fliegerkorps focused on the units of the JKRV in the southern part of the country. These consisted of 35. Grupa, with 15 Hawker Furys, at Kosančić; 101. Eskadrila (36. Grupa), with ten Bf 109Es, at Susicko Polje; plus the three eskadrila of 63. Grupa, with 30 Do 17Ks at Petrovac; two eskadrila of 64. Grupa at Pristina and one at Stubol, with 30 more Do 17Ks. The Bf 109s of LG 2, supported by II./ZG 26, destroyed only a few aircraft on the ground, but in the ensuing dogfight 11 Hawker Furys of 35. Grupa were destroyed, leaving only two in flying condition, which were incorporated on the next day into the 36. Grupa. Its airfield was attacked as well, but the well-camouflaged Furys escaped destruction and attempted to chase the German Bf 109s, only to be fired at by their own anti-aircraft artillery. Petrovac airfield was attacked as well by the LG 2 and the StG 2, which destroyed 14 bombers and damaged others. The three remaining Dorniers flew off to Stubol, from where 64. Grupa reacted, bombing a German column at Kustendil. Later on, the Luftwaffe wiped out 64. Grupa, destroying 15 of its bombers on the ground. Meanwhile, the VIII. Fliegerkorps supported the ground troops bombing the Yugoslav positions along the axis Kumanovo–Skopje.

Three Junkers Ju 87 Stukas flying to their targets in Yugoslavia, April 1941. Even though the censor deleted the unit letters, the StG 77 symbol in front of the cockpit is clearly visible.(Getty)

On 6 April, the Yugoslav losses to VIII. Fliegerkorps, based on German claims that roughly matched the actual situation, amounted to 14 Furys, 34 Do 17s and 14 Breguet XIXs. The Luftwaffe's losses were relatively high, albeit in most cases they were due to mechanical failures or to the poor condition of the airfields. I./StG 2 lost two Ju 87s with two others damaged; I./StG 3 had one aircraft damaged; I./LG 2 lost two Bf 109s;



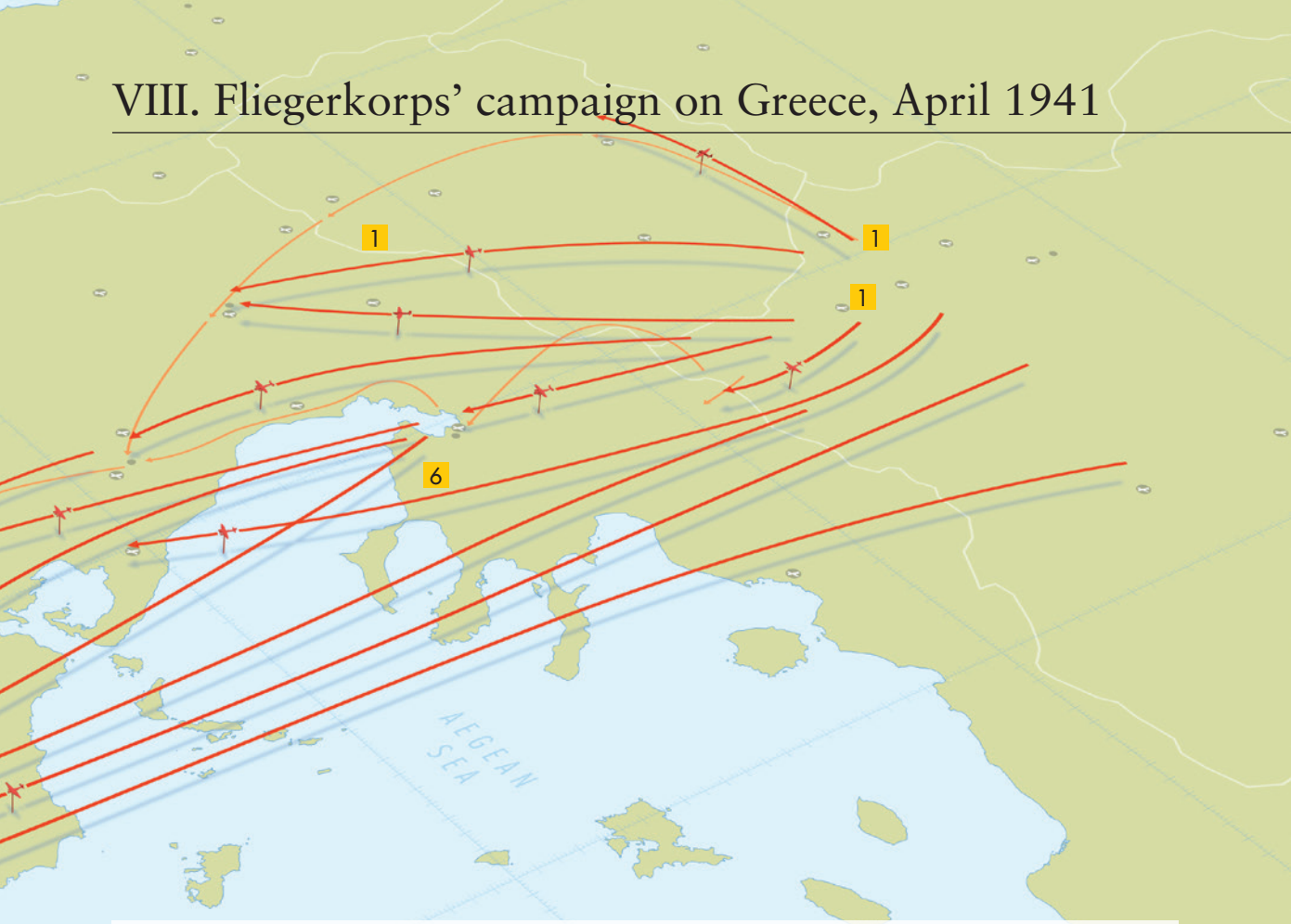
EVENTS

1. 6–9 April 1941. The VIII. Fliegerkorps provide ground support to XXXX. Panzerkorps' advance towards Skoplje and XVIII. Armeekorps attack the Metaxas Line.

2. 6–7 April, evening. 20 Junkers Ju 88 from III./Kampfgeschwader 30, followed by 11 Heinkel He 111 from 2. Staffel/Kampfgeschwader 4, take off from the X. Fliegerkorps bases in Sicily to attack Piraeus harbour in Athens with bombs and sea mines. Most of the Junkers Ju 88 have to jettison their bombload early because of the weather; only the 7.Staffel/Kampfgeschwader 30 attack Piraeus at 2035hrs, hitting the *Clan Fraser* freighter, which explodes at 0315hrs on 7 April. The giant blast wrecks the harbour and sinks 11 merchant vessels, 2 tugs, 60 lighters and 25 caiques for a total of 41,789 tons.

3. 14–15 April. VIII. Fliegerkorps provides ground support to XXXX. Panzerkorps' attack Kozani.

VIII. Fliegerkorps' campaign on Greece, April 1941



4. 16 April. First redeployment of Jäger and Stuka units in Greece at Kozani airfield after a total of 22 claims for aircraft destroyed on the ground the previous day.

5. 13–15 April. VIII. Fliegerkorps starts its own anti-shipping campaign and, on the 15th, Junkers Ju 88 of II./Lehrgeschwader 1 sink British freighters *Goalpara* (5,314 tons) and *Quiloa* (7,765 tons) in the Gulf of Eleusis.

6. 20–21 April. Units of VIII. Fliegerkorps undergo a major reorganization. Jäger and Stuka units redeploy at Larissa airfield where three *Gefechtsverbände* (fighting formations) are formed. Messerschmitt Bf 110 and Dornier Do 17 units move to Salonika; only the Junkers Ju 88 unit remains in Bulgaria, at Plovdiv airfield.

7. 20 April: The air battle of Athens. The Athens area is heavily attacked from dawn by VIII. Fliegerkorps' units using a mixture of Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Bf 110, Dornier Do 17 and Junkers Ju 88. The area is defended by the 30th, 33rd and 80th RAF Fighter Squadron deployed at Eleusis which still has 14 Blenheim IF and a total of 16 Hurricanes. Eleusis is attacked at 1533hrs by the Messerschmitt Bf 109 of II./Jagdgeschwader 27 which destroys two 33rd RAF Squadron Hurricanes on the ground. At 1645hrs, a formation of 100 Junkers Ju 88 and Dornier Do 17, escorted by Messerschmitt Bf 110 of II./Zerstörergeschwader 26 (later joined by the Messerschmitt Bf 109 of 4. Staffel/Jagdgeschwader 27), approach Athens and are intercepted by nine Hurricanes from 33rd RAF Squadron and six from 80th RAF Squadron. After refuelling and re-arming, three Hurricanes from 33rd RAF Squadron take off again, attacking a formation of Junkers Ju 88 and then being attacked themselves by the Messerschmitt Bf 110 of 5. Staffel/ Zerstörergeschwader 26 which shoots down Pattle's Hurricane. Although RAF losses are low (eight Hurricanes), the VIII. Fliegerkorps can claim air supremacy. Two days later RAF units start evacuating to Crete.

8. 24–27 April. VIII. Fliegerkorps provides ground support and interdiction in the Larissa area, the last defensive line before the Thermopylae.

9. From 23 April. VIII. Fliegerkorps concentrates on anti-shipping attacks, between southern Greece and Crete in an attempt to prevent the Allied evacuation.

10. 53 Junkers Ju 52 of Kampfgruppe z.b.V. 2 and DFS 230 gliders towed by Ju 52 of I./Luftlandegeschwader 1 drop the Fallschirmjäger Regiment 2 in the Corinth Canal area, VIII. Fliegerkorps provide air support while troops secure the area and cut off mainland Greece from the Peloponnese.

11. 24–29 April. Allied evacuation from Greece. 33 ships (mainly Greek) are sunk by VIII. Fliegerkorps, but without stopping the evacuation.

OPPOSITE ALLIED AND AXIS AIR BASES IN GREECE, BULGARIA AND ALBANIA 1941

II./LG 2 three Bf 109s and one Henschel Hs 123, plus one Bf 109 damaged; 10./LG 2 lost one Hs 123 and had another damaged; II./ZG 26 lost two Bf 110s, at least one to anti-aircraft fire. The JG 27 suffered the most: the Stab lost one Bf 109 crash-landed; II. Gruppe lost two Bf 109s and had three damaged; III. Gruppe lost a total of seven Bf 109s with two damaged. Among the losses of II./JG 27 were the three Bf 109s shot down by RAF No.30 Squadron, which with 12 Hurricanes flew its first mission over Bulgaria. While the bulk of the EVA moved to the Kalambaka–Vassiliki airfields, at night the Wellingtons of No.37 Squadron bombed targets in Bulgaria.

The speed of the German advance proved decisive. On 8 April both Tetovo and Prjlep were reached, the German forces reaching the Albanian border two days later, helped by five massive Stuka raids, which caused the disintegration of an entire division south-west of Stip. They were now in position to move into Greece through the Florina Gap. Meanwhile, on 9 April the Germans had also outflanked the Metaxas Line and seized Salonika, the first step towards the collapse of the Allied front. As the situation evolved, both sides were reinforced. The VIII. Fliegerkorps was allotted two Jagd-, two Stuka- and one Do 17 Gruppen, the first to move being on 10 April, the Jagdgruppe Winterfeld (from Major Alexander von Winterfeld, commander of III./JG 77). The RAF in Greece was reinforced by No.208 Army Co-operation Squadron, whose three Hurricanes and eight Westland Lysanders had arrived on 6 April. As the RAF carried out yet another mission against Bulgaria, this time with nine Blenheims from No.11 Squadron escorted by a dozen Hurricanes from No.33 Squadron, the VIII. Fliegerkorps still focused on southern Yugoslavia, confronting the army for the use of the fuel depots discovered intact at Skopje. With the JKRV disappearing from the sky on 10 April, von Richthofen started planning the subsequent phase of the campaign. Since 11 April, the VIII. Fliegerkorps had switched to anti-shipping missions in the area of Volos, while carrying out interdiction missions along the Kozani–Larissa–Veria road.

The air war in Greece

Weather conditions limited air activity on 11 and 12 April, both sides carrying out mostly strafing missions greatly hampered by poor visibility and, in the case of the RAF, by flak. Between 7 and 12 April, the VIII. Fliegerkorps' losses were low, as a consequence. II./JG 27 had two Bf 109s damaged; I./LG 1 had two Ju 88s damaged; I./LG 2 lost one Bf 109 that had crash-landed and had one other damaged; 7./LG 2 lost one Bf 110 and had another damaged. The StG 2 suffered heavily with two Ju 87s damaged and a Do 17 destroyed from its Stab and three Ju 87s from III./StG 2 lost in southern Yugoslavia, while II./ZG 26 had two Bf 110s destroyed and one damaged in crash-landings. When the Luftflotte 4 began to redeploy, the poor condition of Yugoslav airfields caused more losses. On 9 April, 9./KG 2 lost one Do 17 at Rovine, and on the following day III./StG 77 lost one Ju 87 at Lamia.

Air operations continued, somehow. On 11 April, Squadron Leader Marmaduke Pattle, now commanding officer of No.33 Squadron, shot down two Ju 88s from III./KG 30 that were laying mines off Volos, and on that same day six Blenheims from No.84 Squadron attacked the Prjlep–Bitolj road losing one aircraft to flak. The arrival from Egypt of a detachment of the Wellington-equipped No.38 Squadron enabled it to carry out a night bombing mission against Sofia and the Veles airfield. During the same night, one Blenheim Mk IF from No.30 Squadron was lost while attempting to intercept a Ju 88 from I./LG 1 near Athens.

On 12 April, Blenheims and Hurricanes attacked the road from Bitolj to Veles, just as the VIII. Fliegerkorps' anti-shipping missions had its first result with the sinking of the 674-ton

Regia Aeronautica
1. Durazzo
120° Squadriglia OA
2. Tirana
22° Gruppo autonomo CT
160° Gruppo autonomo CT
101° Gruppo autonomo BaT
25ª Squadriglia OA
87ª Squadriglia OA
114ª Squadriglia OA
3. Berat
31ª Squadriglia OA
39ª Squadriglia OA
4. Valona
22° Gruppo autonomo CT
42ª Squadriglia OA
5. Devoli
24° Gruppo autonomo CT
154° Gruppo autonomo CT
6. Peqini
35ª Squadriglia OA
Luftwaffe
1. Sofia – Vrazdebna
I. (Jäger)/Lehrgeschwader 2
2. Sofia – Filiporci
2 (F)/Aufklärungsstaffel 11
3. Krainici
10. Staffel/Lehrgeschwader 2
I./Stukageschwader 1 Zerstorer Geschwader 26
4. Belica
Stab/Jagdgeschwader 27
I./Stukageschwader 2
III./Stukageschwader 3
5. Krumovo (Varna)
I. (Kampf)/Lehrgeschwader 1
7. Seenotdienststaffel
IV./Kampfgruppe z.b.V. 1
Pec
Pristina
YUGOSLAVIA
Podgorica
Prizren
See map 2
Skoplje
Scutari
ALBANIA
Durazzo
Tirana
Peqini
Berat
Devoli
Valona
Florina
Kastoria
Kozani
Sofia – Filiporci
Sofia
Sofia – Vrazdebna
Karlovo
Samokov
Krainici
Krumovo (Varna)
BULGARIA
Belica
Smolyan
Kavalla
Salonika – Sedes
Yannina
Kalambaka – Vassiliki
Larissa
Trikkala
Kazaklar (Larissa Ambledon)
Niamata (Larissa)
Paramitya
Volos
Pharsala
Almyros
Arta
GREECE
Lamia
Evacuation beaches for the British forces
Agrinion
Allied – Royal Hellenic Air Force/Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm (Crete exluded)
1. Larissa
23 Mira Dioxes
1. Larissa/
2. Eleusis (Athens)
33rd Fighter Squadron RAF
2. Eleusis (Athens)
80th Fighter Squadron RAF
30th Fighter Squadron RAF
208th Reconnaissance Squadron RAF
3. Yannina
4. Paramitya
112th Fighter Squadron RAF
4. Paramitya
211th Bomber Squadron RAF
815th Bomber Squadron FAA
21 Mira Dioxes
5. Almyros
11th Bomber Squadron RAF
6. Tatoi/Menidi (Athens)
84th Bomber Squadron RAF
37th Bomber Squadron RAF
31 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants)
32 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants)
33 Mira Vomvardismou (remnants)
7. Niamata (Larissa)
114th Bomber Squadron RAF
8. Kazaklar (Larissa Ambledon)
9. Salonika – Sedes
22 Mira Dioxes
24 Mira Dioxes
NB Airfields 10,11,12,13 were used later in the campaign.
Patras
Araxos
Eleusis (Athens)
Tatoi/Menidi (Athens)
Athens
Corinth
Kalamaki/ Kasanice
Argos
N
0
50 miles
0
50km

Map 4

A *Kette* of Dornier Do 17s flying over the Acropolis. An outdated bomber, it was still in use during the campaign and equipped both Kampfgeschwader 2 and 3. (Getty)

ship *Retriever*. The weather and the problems related to the forward redeployment of the Gruppen, along with the shortage of supplies, in particular of fuel and bombs, reduced the tempo of the VIII. Fliegerkorps' operations. Meanwhile Luftflotte 4 transferred other units to the VIII. Fliegerkorps. Ju 88-equipped I./KG 51 was followed by the Do 17-equipped KG 2, by the StG 77, by the I./JG 27, by II. and III./JG 77 and by I./ZG 26, thus having five bomber Gruppen, five dive-bomber Gruppen, five fighter Gruppen and two Zerstörer Gruppen. By 19 April, 19 out of the 26 Gruppen of Luftflotte 4 were under control of VIII. Fliegerkorps, with 165 bombers out of 255 (137 operational). The VIII. Fliegerkorps could now rely on 653 aircraft, 511 of which were operational. These were to enforce the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe directive that required a focus on anti-shipping warfare without depriving the army of its ground support.

On 13 April, Easter Sunday, air operations were resumed in full. While the VIII. Fliegerkorps supported the 9. Panzer Division advance by bombing roads and centres of resistance in the Ptolemais–Kozani–Servia area, Volos was bombed in force by 70 Ju 88s of I./LG 1 which devastated the harbour and sank, amongst others, the 7,140-ton City of Karachi and the 5,000-ton Norwegian tanker Brattdal. Hurricanes from No.33 Squadron intercepted the German bombers and shot down one Ju 88, with II./LG 1 from Sicily losing another over Piraeus. Six Blenheims from No.211 Squadron, which headed for Prjlep, were engaged over the Lakes of Prespa by three Bf 109s from 6./JG 27, all six unescorted bombers being shot down one after the other. The No.211 Squadron's ill-fated patrol was followed by nine Blenheims from No.113 Squadron that were escorted by six Hurricanes. Having noticed the slaughter of the No.211 Squadron, the Hurricane pilots were raring to intervene, but adhered to the strict orders not to leave their charge. During the night, one of the six Wellingtons from No.38 Squadron that had been sent to bomb Sofia failed to return.

On 14 April, as the British and Commonwealth forces completed their withdrawal to the Mount Olympus–Servia line, six Blenheims from No.84 Squadron escorted by four Hurricanes attacked the German troops north of Ptolemais, Bf 109s and flak damaging four of the bombers. RAF activity reached its peak with eight Blenheims from No.113 Squadron, escorted by ten Hurricanes, also attacking the Ptolemais area. They were followed by seven Blenheims from No.33 Squadron and by three Hurricanes from No.80 Squadron which claimed a Ju 87 shot down. Likewise, the VIII. Fliegerkorps was active in support of the ground troops with seven Stuka, three Schlacht, one Zerstörer and seven Jäger missions in

the Kozani and Servia area, while the Do 17s bombed the Elasson crossroad, albeit with poor results. At night, the Ju 88s, joined by seven RA bombers from Rhodes, four S.81s from the 56° Gruppo and three S.79s from the 92° Gruppo, attacked Piraeus, claiming four ships sunk and eight damaged. One Ju 88 was shot down by a No.33 Squadron Hurricane, while a 22 Mira PZL claimed one Ju 87 shot down near Trikkala.

On 15 April the VIII. Fliegerkorps was out again in full strength to support the army now advancing following the British withdrawal from the Olympus–Servia line. Servia, Kastoria, Grevena, Trikkala and Larissa were attacked, along with Piraeus, where the Luftwaffe was joined again by the RA with ten bombers from Rhodes, seven S.81s from the 56° Gruppo and three S.79s from the 92° Gruppo. Nine ships were claimed to have been hit for the loss of two Ju 88s. A series of mass raids against the Trikkala and Larissa airfields was also carried out, this time claiming four fighters shot down and 22 aircraft destroyed on the ground for the loss of four of their own. In detail, 15 Bf 109s from the II./JG 77 attacked Larissa, where No.33 Squadron Hurricanes managed to get airborne and shot down two Bf 109s, losing two of their number. II./JG 27 was over Kalambaka and Vassiliki striking what was left of the EVA. Some 15 PZLs, Gladiators and Bloch 151s were attacked by some 20 Bf 109s that destroyed at least nine aircraft, as well as two Lysanders from No.208 Squadron, and another PZL was shot down over Larissa. The attack against Paramythia, carried out in five waves by the Bf 109s of II./JG 27, led to the destruction of the Blenheims of No.113 Squadron that ceased to exist as a combat unit. The RAF's only success of the day came when 25 Ju 88s from I./LG 1 and I./KG 51 were intercepted over Piraeus, Pilot Officer Roald Dahl shooting down one of them. Overall, between 13 and 15 April, Luftwaffe losses amounted to 18 aircraft, with 22 more damaged. In detail, II./JG 27 lost one Bf 109 and had three damaged, plus one from the Ergänzungs Staffel; II./JG 54 lost one Bf 109 and had one damaged; II./JG 77 lost two Bf 109s and had two damaged, plus another from the Stab; I./StG 1 lost one Ju 87; III./StG 2 lost two with one damaged, while the rest of the Geschwader had had four Ju 87s damaged. I./StG 3 lost one Ju 87 at Servia, while the StG 77 had four Ju 87s damaged. I./LG 1 lost three Ju 88s and had one damaged; I./KG 51 lost two Ju 88s with two others damaged; II./KG 51 lost three Ju 88s and had three damaged, the IV. Gruppe having a single Ju 88 damaged. The KG 2 lost one Bf 110 and one Do 17, also having three Bf 109s damaged.

On 15 April the VIII. Fliegerkorps started redeploying and most of its Gruppen reached the new airfields on the next day. Three Gefechtsverbände (combat formations) were formed with a mixed composition of Bf 109s and Ju 87s, to provide ground support to the advancing troops. The Gefechtsverband Woldenga (Major Bernhard Woldenga, Kommodore JG 77), Dinort (Oberstleutnant Oskar Dinort, Kommodore StG 2) and Schellmann (Major Wolfgang Schellmann, Kommodore JG 27) deployed in the airfields in the Kozani–Ptolemais area, while Do 17 and He 111 Gruppen deployed at Salonika. Given the lack of space, the Ju 88 Gruppen were stationed in the Bulgarian airfield of Plovdiv. The day marked the beginning of the final stage of the air battle for Greece. In compliance with the OBdL directive,

A group of pilots from RAF No.80 Fighter Squadron sitting in front of a Hurricane Mk I at Eleusis, probably shortly before the German attack. Worth noting, No.80 Squadron seems to have used both squadron and individual letters, while No.33 Squadron used only the squadron letters. (IWM)

Corfu, 28 April 1941. BR.20s of the 277ª Squadriglia (116° Gruppo, 37° Stormo BT) are orbiting at low altitude over the city and the harbour to provide cover for the air landing and to intimidate the garrison. Four of the five CANT Z.506Bs that have brought in the small detachment can be seen next to the beach.(AC)

von Richthofen paid little attention to providing support to the advancing army and focused instead on achieving air supremacy over Greece, Athens in particular, in order to gain the freedom required for effective anti-shipping operations. VIII. Fliegerkorps' main problem remained supplies, more so following the redeployment, and von Richthofen clashed with the army, which refused to hand over its trucks. This aggravated the already existing shortage of bombs and fuel to the three Gefechtsverbände.

Facing the German advance, the RAF redeployed as well, moving to the airfields near Athens. The Hurricanes and Blenheims of No.33, No.80 and No.30 Squadrons went to Eleusis, being joined there by the few remaining Blenheims of No.211 Squadron, while No.112 and No.208 Squadrons went to Hassani. The Blenheims of No.11 and No.84 Squadrons redeployed to Menidi, while the Wellington detachments of No.37 and No.38 Squadrons flew back to Shallufa in Egypt. Considering that by 15 April the JKRV had virtually ceased to exist, and the EVA was down to 11 PZLs, eight Gladiators and two Bloch 151s, all at Amfiklia, there was very little left to fight against the 500-odd aircraft of the VIII. Fliegerkorps, let alone the RA. The RAF could field 71 aircraft: 14 Blenheim Mk IFs with No.30 Squadron, 18 Hurricanes (five with No.33 Squadron, 11 with No.80 Squadron, two with No.208 Squadron which also had five Lysanders), 12 Gladiators with No.112 Squadron, 22 Blenheim bombers (eight with No.11 Squadron, nine with No.84 Squadron, five with No.211 Squadron, with No.113 Squadron having no operational aircraft). No.11 Squadron took over command of all the Blenheim bombers.

Bad weather prevented major operations on 16 April, with the Luftwaffe focusing its anti-shipping attacks on Volos and Chalkida. One Ju 88 from I./LG 1 and one from I./KG 51 were shot down by the Hurricanes of No.80 Squadron and by anti-aircraft fire, and two others were damaged and had to crash-land. Furthermore, three Do 17s from KG 2 were shot down by No.80 Squadron Hurricanes near Eleusis. The weather was still adverse on 17 April, but air operations had a new start on the 18th, when 16 Hurricanes from No.33 and No.80

A Henschel Hs 126 flying over Athens. Unfortunately, the unit letters have been censored and the marking near the cowling cannot be identified. The Hs 126 was widely used for reconnaissance during the campaign, but apparently without success. (Alamy)

A group of pilots from RAF No.33 Fighter Squadron posing in front of a Hurricane Mk I at Larissa. Amongst others, Flying Officer E.J. 'Timber' Woods is sitting on the left side, Squadron Leader Marmaduke St John Pattle is the fourth from left, leaning on the ground. In contrast to common belief, Hurricane V7419 was not Pattle's aircraft. (IWM)

Squadrons flew in parade over Athens in an attempt to raise morale despite the Yugoslav surrender. On that very day, the VIII. Fliegerkorps attacked en masse the British defensive positions south of Mount Olympus claiming the destruction of about 300 trucks and 30 tanks, while continuing with the anti-shipping campaign off the Chalkidiki peninsula. The RAF intervened, and seven Hurricanes from No.80 Squadron attacked a formation of some 40 Ju 87s of I./StG 3 en route to bombing the British positions, shooting down two. The Hurricanes were counter-attacked by the Bf 109s of II./JG 27 but managed to escape without losses. Facing a still-active RAF, on 19 April the VIII. Fliegerkorps started a two-day massive counter-air offensive targeting the enemy airfields, Amfiklia being the first. The Bf 109s of I./JG 77 strafed the remaining fighters of the EVA, claiming ten destroyed on the ground and four in the air. Only three Greek fighters survived, joining the remnants of 23 Mira at Eleusis.

The air war in Greece climaxed on 20 April. That day saw the VIII. Fliegerkorps launching a series of massive attacks in the Athens area, aimed at the airfields, at Piraeus harbour as well as at ships and troops. In the morning, ZG 26 attacked the Menidi airfield, while 36 Bf 109s from JG 77, some of them armed with bombs, attacked Athens and Piraeus. In spite of some

The Air Battle of Athens, 20 April 1941

With the German Army advancing rapidly and the Luftwaffe methodically attacking every airfield, the RAF had no choice other than to withdraw its remaining aircraft to the airports around Athens that were the best equipped and best defended in the country. Starting on the morning of 20 April, the Luftwaffe launched a series of massive air raids on Athens, striking not only at the harbour but also at the nearby airports. In spite of there being a number of Hurricanes on combat air patrol, the first raids went almost unopposed but the following ones faced the tenacity of the Hurricanes from No.33 and No.80 Squadrons. After a massive midday raid, the VIII. Fliegerkorps was back in all its strength in the afternoon, this time inflicting severe losses. At 1645hrs, some 100 Junkers Ju 88s and Dornier Do 17s approached Athens with an escort of Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Bf 110s. The available Hurricanes of both No.33 and No.80 Squadrons attacked at once, with Squadron Leader Pattle, the South African air ace and commander of No.33 Squadron, in the lead. Pattle, who was suffering from fatigue and was feverish, had Flying Officer Vernon Woodward as his wingman. The two went after a number of Ju 88s and one of the escorting Bf 110s got on Pattle's tail, only to be shot down by Woodward. Right after, Pattle rushed to the aid of Flight Lieutenant William J. Woods, from No.80 Squadron, who also had a Bf 110 on his tail. He opened fire at this aircraft, later identified as the one flown by Oberleutnant Kurt Specka, that was seen to burst into flames, just as Woods' Hurricane also caught fire and dived into the sea killing his pilot. Pattle had now lost contact with Woodward and the Bf 110 of Oberleutnant Theodor Rossiwal, the Staffel Kapitän of 5./ZG 26, had an easy game in latching onto his tail. Pattle's Hurricane exploded and the wreckage fell into the sea, the scene being witnessed and later described by Roald Dahl in his book of memoirs *Going Solo*.

GRAHAM TURNER

Corfu, 28 April 1941. The commanding officer of the 35° Stormo, Colonnello Enrico Grande, lands to receive the surrender of the garrison. Five CANT Z.506Bs of the 86° Gruppo BM have brought in his small advance party. On 30 April, the island of Cefalonia would be occupied in the same way, supported by a parachute company. (AC)

12 Hurricanes on patrol, the Germans suffered no losses in this first phase of what would be known as the Battle for Athens. Four Blenheims were destroyed on the ground, with five more being damaged. Only over Chalkida did the Hurricanes of No.80 Squadron achieve a victory, a Bf 109 from Stab/JG 27 that was escorting the bombers attacking the ships in the area. In the afternoon, VIII. Fliegerkorps' fighters and bombers swept all over the Attiki, bombing and strafing at will and facing only the opposition of the few serviceable Hurricanes of No.33 Squadron. At about 1400hrs, 29 Bf 109s from II. and III./JG 27 attacked Eleusis and Tanagra airfields, being engaged by Squadron Leader Pattle who claimed two shot down while the Germans claimed 13 aircraft destroyed on the ground. At 1535hrs, Eleusis was the target of 27 Bf 109s from II./JG 27, which destroyed on the ground two Hurricanes of No.33 Squadron and two of the three Greek fighters deployed there.

The biggest attack of the day came at about 1645hrs, with some 100 Ju 88s and Do 17s escorted by Bf 109s and Bf 110s. No.33 and No.80 Squadrons put all available Hurricanes in the air, nine and six respectively, splitting them into two or three aircraft patrols to attack the German bombers. Two Ju 88s were shot down and a third damaged, with a single Hurricane returning to Eleusis in flames. At this point four other Hurricanes from No.80 Squadron took off and joined the battle, attacking a formation of Do 17s from I. and III./KG 2 that were soon rescued by their Bf 109 escort. During the mêlée, two Do 17s and one Bf 109 were claimed by the RAF pilots, in return for the loss of one Hurricane plus another damaged. In fact, three Do 17s were shot down and two Bf 109s crash-landed, while I./JG 27 claimed four Hurricanes. As the battle reached its peak, Squadron Leader Pattle landed, rearmed and took off again, despite being feverish, to lead his patrol against some Ju 88s with a massive escort of Bf 110s. The fighting broke down into a series of individual dogfights, Pattle being shot down and killed just after he had brought down a Bf 110, the scene being witnessed by Roald Dahl who later described it in his memoirs. 5./ZG 26 claimed five Hurricanes for the loss of two of its Bf 110s with a third one forced to a crash-landing. At the end of the

day, the Germans claimed 14 Hurricanes and one Spitfire (a clear mistake) plus 21 aircraft destroyed on the ground at the Agrinion, Tanagra, Menidi and Eleusis airfields. The VIII. Fliegerkorps losses amounted to five Bf 109s, three Bf 110s, two Ju 88s and four Do 17s with the RAF actually losing eight Hurricanes plus one damaged, with four pilots killed and one fatally wounded. On 20 April, the Greek Army in Epirus surrendered, leaving the battered RAF squadrons no other option than to abandon Greece.

The next morning, Bf 109s and Ju 87s returned to Eleusis for a strafing attack aimed at destroying what was left of the RAF but taking care not to drop bombs on the runway, the Ju 87s restricting themselves to attacking the hangars. Two Hurricanes were destroyed and one Bf 109 was hit by anti-aircraft fire. Menidi was the next target, this time being attacked by Bf 109s and Bf 110s, with Agrinion and Piraeus to follow. On 21 April, the Luftwaffe lost two Bf 110s from 5./ZG 26 in a mid-air collision and a troop-carrying Junkers Ju 52s which was shot down by the Turkish anti-aircraft artillery after having accidentally crossed the border, all those aboard being killed.

Meanwhile on 19 April a further redeployment had been devised for the VIII. Fliegerkorps. Fighter and dive-bomber units of the Gefechtsverbände Woldenga, Dinort and Schellmann were to move to Larissa, while the Zerstörer and the Do 17s deployed to Salonika, leaving the Ju 88s at Plovdiv, given the lack of space on the new airfields. The move had started on the 20th, placing further strain on a logistics system already under stress. In spite of the practical absence of any opposition in the air, the VIII. Fliegerkorps still suffered some losses between 21 and 30 April. The JG 27 lost three Bf 109s to enemy fighters and ground fire with two more damaged, the JG 77 lost four Bf 109s, but only one in combat, namely an aircraft from II./JG 77 shot down over Athens, all the others, like the four that suffered some damage, due to poor airfields. Three of the four Bf 110s written off by I./ZG 26 were lost to enemy action, while II./ZG 26 lost one Bf 110 in a dive attack in addition to the two that collided in mid-air. Needless to say, the losses suffered by the Stuka Gruppen were more relevant. The StG 2 lost one Do 17 (Stab), four Ju 87s of I./StG 2 and one of III./StG 2, at least two of them, all from I./StG 2, due to enemy action. I./StG 3 lost one Ju 87 over Larissa, while III./StG 77 lost two, one of them to ground fire. Only two of the 14 aircraft from KG 2 that were recorded as lost or damaged were actually damaged in combat, both by ground fire. Out of these 14 Do 17s, six were lost and damaged, mostly from III./KG 2, which had three written off and four damaged. III./KG 3 lost a single Do 17 over Corinth, I./KG 51 lost four Ju 88s and had one damaged due to mechanical failures or landing accidents, while I./LG 1 lost three Ju 88s due to enemy fighters and had three more damaged because of bad landings, while I./LG 2 lost one Bf 109 in a landing accident and had another one damaged by enemy fire. LG 2's only loss was a Bf 110 involved in a mid-air collision, but two Bf 109s and three Hs 123s were damaged in landing accidents, which is revealing of the conditions under which the VIII. Fliegerkorps operated.

DFS 230 gliders towed by Henschel Hs 126 aircraft flying to their target, the Corinth Canal bridge on 26 April 1941. The attack, albeit successful, failed to secure the seizure of the bridge which was accidentally destroyed. (Getty)

Menidi airfield was strafed again on 22 April, just as the remnants of Operation *Barbarity* prepared their evacuation. Whatever aircraft were left to No.11, No.84 and No.211 Squadrons boarded ground personnel and left for Crete, starting a series of shuttle flights, which enabled most of those who had been fighting in Greece to evacuate, even though

not without incident. The six operational Gladiators of No.112 Squadron, out of 14, also left for Crete, along with the four remaining Lysanders of No.208 Squadron, the ground personnel of No.112 Squadron being ordered to move from Athens to Argos to be evacuated. Sunderland flying boats from No.230 Squadron also evacuated personnel to Crete, leaving behind only six Hurricanes, which had been sent first to Megara, then, in the afternoon of the 21st, to Argos where they were joined by the 12 Hurricanes from Eleusis still in flying condition. This airfield, already in poor condition, was overcrowded since it also hosted the last remnants of the EVA, with eight PZL P.24s. The attempt to set up an air base at Argos was immediately discovered by the VIII. Fliegerkorps, whose priority was now to eliminate the remaining enemy presence in Greece. On 23 April, the Hurricanes of what was left of *Barbarity*, now reinforced by five more machines flown from Crete, went airborne to chase German aircraft with some success. A Do 17 was damaged near Corinth, one Ju 88 was forced to crash-land near Athens and a section of Hurricanes sent to protect Piraeus claimed three Ju 87s which the Germans recorded as lost on the 24th. Just after the arrival of the Hurricanes from Crete, the VIII. Fliegerkorps attacked Argos with 20–25 Do 17s followed by as many Ju 88s acting as level bombers. The attackers were escorted by some Bf 109s from II. and III./JG 77 that soon after strafed the airfield, along with the Bf 110s of ZG 26. Only one Hurricane tried to take off, without success. Other raids followed, the last one just before sunset by some 40 Bf 110s from I./ZG 26 that were met by three Hurricanes. At the end, the Germans reported the loss of a single Bf 109 and claimed the destruction of at least 53 aircraft. In fact, all the remaining Greek aircraft were destroyed, along with most of the Hurricanes, of which only two survived together with the five that were airborne during the attack. All seven left Argos at 0430hrs on the next morning, bound for Crete.

The anti-shipping campaign

The VIII. Fliegerkorps was now free to act at will having complete air supremacy, but had still to cope with different tasks. On 24 and 25 April, the Ju 87s supported the German attack that broke through the last British defence at Thermopylae while, following the arrival of the paratroopers of the 7. Fliegerdivision at Larissa, several missions were flown over the Corinth Canal to pave the way for the airborne assault that took place on the 26th. Interdiction missions were flown on the road from Lamia to Amfiklia, Thebes and Athens to hinder the withdrawal of the enemy troops but, as recorded, they were quite unsuccessful. The 500kg bombs effectively cratered the road but the huge craters also slowed down the German pursuit. It ought to be said that several factors hampered the VIII. Fliegerkorps' effort, such as inadequate supplies, the problems caused by continuously redeploying from one airfield to another, and, last but not least, the inadequacy of the air reconnaissance to locate the enemy forces. This half-failure, however, was not of major concern for von Richthofen, who now focused on the anti-shipping missions, reckoning that they could prevent the evacuation of the British and Commonwealth forces from Greece. The growing effectiveness of the anti-shipping missions suggested he was right.

The VIII. Fliegerkorps' series of claims had started on 13 April, when one merchant vessel was reported as sunk and two as damaged in the Volos area, followed on the next day by four sunk and eight damaged in Piraeus. On 15 April, the sinking of eight merchant ships and the damage of one was again reported following more raids on Piraeus, along with the damage of a destroyer near Volos. On the 16th, three merchant ships were reported as sunk off Chalkida and a fourth at Volos, with another three damaged north of the island of Euboea. After a day's lull, on 18 April five merchantmen were reported as sunk and one as damaged off Chalkida, with four others sunk and two damaged on the next day in the same area. By 19 April, a total of 26 merchant ships (for 173,600 tons) were reported sunk and 17 damaged (for 116,000 tons) along with the one destroyer. The actual number of ships

sunk in those days was 13, for a grand total of 57,712 tons, mostly (apart from the City of Karachi) Greek ones.

The number of successes reported by his crews had von Richthofen think that it was possible to effectively interdict the sea routes to Crete and Egypt, therefore engaging more and more units in this task. From 20 to 22 April, 26 more ships were claimed as sunk, including one tanker and one destroyer, and 29 as damaged, including a destroyer and a cruiser. As the area of the anti-shipping campaign extended, at first south of continental Greece, then around Crete, the number of claims rose accordingly, and by 29 April it was up to 120 merchant vessels sunk (for 569,100 tons), along with five warships, and 129 merchant vessels damaged (for 701,600 tons), along with ten warships. The actual number sunk is hard to ascertain, and not all those sunk in Greek waters (Crete included) can be attributed to the VIII. Fliegerkorps, since the X. Fliegerkorps was also active in the area, as well as the RA. Overall figures show that 97 vessels were definitely sunk from 20 to 30 April, plus another 11 probables (the actual date is uncertain), for some 162,000 tons. Adding the ships sunk before 20 April, the total is 121 merchant vessels for some 220,000 tons, mostly Greek apart from one Dutch and ten British ships, plus one Greek battleship and one Greek destroyer and two British destroyers, one of them off Crete. Thus, even if the actual number of those sunk roughly matches the VIII. Fliegerkorps' claims, there was a clear overestimation of the tonnage actually sunk, in most cases regarding a small ship as a major vessel.

In spite of undeniable overclaiming, the VIII. Fliegerkorps was indeed quite successful in its anti-shipping effort. By 22 April, 23 vessels were reported sunk in Piraeus, the Luftwaffe also accounting for the old Greek destroyer *Psara* in the harbour of Megara and the destroyer *Ydra* which was escorting a convoy off Piraeus. In the Gulf of Corinth, I./StG 2's Ju 87 sank the tanker *Theodora* and damaged the coastal tanker *Theodol II*. On 24 April, three vessels loaded with ammunition and explosives were attacked in Nauplia Bay and sunk, once again (as during the first attack against Piraeus) following the cargo explosion. The sinking of the luxury yacht *Hellas* while evacuating 1,000 people from Piraeus caused the highest number of victims with only a few survivors. Still, it is worth noting that the start of Operation *Demon*, the Allied evacuation from Greece on 24 April, went unnoticed by the VIII. Fliegerkorps, which failed to recognize the embarkation zones and consequently failed to attack them and the ships involved. On 24–25 April, only the *Glenearn* liner was hit by two

A *Kette* (section) of Messerschmitt Bf 110 fighters flying over the Balkans. Even though the Bf 110 had proved itself of not much use during the Battle of Britain, it was still useful against the outdated aircraft equipping the Greek and Yugoslav air forces. (Getty)

A Savoia-Marchetti S.79 bomber in Yugoslav colours, photographed after its capture by the Italians following the surrender of Yugoslavia. Along with the German Dornier Do 17 and the British Blenheim Mk I, it formed the bulk of the Yugoslav bomber force. (Alamy)

He 111s off Nauplia, a fire starting but being soon extinguished, and four casualties being suffered on board. The chaos was such that six Blenheim Mk IFs from No.30 and three Blenheim Mk IVFs from No.203 Squadron, sent from Crete to protect the evacuation, chased one another simply because they had not been informed of the situation. Which did not prevent the Germans from sinking the *Ulster Prince* passenger ferry at Nauplia, without loss of lives. The other success was the damage of the Dutch vessel *Pennland*, which turned back to Crete.

Since 26 April, as the forward elements of VIII. Fliegerkorps started redeploying at Eleusis, the anti-shipping campaign extended to the Aegean Sea between mainland Greece and Crete. Anti-aircraft cruisers and a number of destroyers made good the lack of fighter coverage, nevertheless several ships were attacked and some of them suffered damage which did not prevent the evacuation from being carried out successfully. On 29 April, the first air attack on Crete was recorded and on the next day Operation *Demon* came to an end, with more than 50,000 troops being taken off to Crete or to Egypt. In the early hours, a Sunderland flew off from Crete bound for Alexandria, with Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac on board. This marked the end of the *Barbarity* force and the air campaign in the Balkans. Its overall costs can be hard to estimate. During the Italo-Greek war, from October 1940 to April 1941, Italian records list 65 aircraft lost in combat and 495 damaged, with another 14 destroyed and 71 damaged on the ground. The short war against Yugoslavia did cost RA five aircraft, with 17 damaged. The EVA claimed the destruction of 58 Italian and five German aircraft, while the RAF claimed 150 Italian and 81 German aircraft, plus 94 probables in the air and 28, plus five probables destroyed on the ground. It is obvious that the total of Greek and British claims against the RA, 208 aircraft destroyed, far exceeds the actual number of aircraft lost by the Italians. The JKRV claimed the destruction of 30 German aircraft.

Overclaiming also took place with the RA and the Luftwaffe. The RA claimed a total of 218 Greek and British aircraft shot down, plus 55 probables, along with five Yugoslav aircraft plus one probable. The Luftwaffe claimed 110 aircraft shot down and 246 destroyed on the ground, mostly British and Greek with 30–40 of those Yugoslav. Of these numbers, the VIII. Fliegerkorps had the largest share, reporting 61 aircraft destroyed in combat, out of 110, and all 246 destroyed on the ground. The actual losses of the EVA were 32 aircraft in combat, seven of them to anti-aircraft fire, and some 130 destroyed on the ground. The actual losses suffered by the JKRV are unknown, but it is reckoned that more than 500 Yugoslav aircraft were either destroyed or captured. The RAF recorded 72 aircraft lost in combat, 55 destroyed on the ground and 82 abandoned, to which nine aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm must be added. Overall the Luftwaffe's recorded losses amounted to 182 aircraft, including those with damage estimated at more than 60 per cent, 50 of them over Yugoslavia and 114 over Greece. In more detail, Luftwaffe losses included 54 Messerschmitt Bf 109s, 34 Junkers Ju 88s, 29 Junkers Ju 87s, 29 Dornier Do 17s, 23 Messerschmitt Bf 110s, six Henschel Hs 126s, two Henschel Hs 123s and one Heinkel He 111.

AFTERMATH AND ANALYSIS

The actual evolution of the air campaign in the Balkans between 1940 and 1941 makes drawing conclusions a hard task. Three different campaigns were fought, the Italo-Greek war, the April 1941 war against Yugoslavia and the April 1941 war against Greece. Putting to one side the foul weather, the role played by the air forces on both sides was limited due to the shortcomings of doctrine and tactics, the poor logistics and lack of effective solutions to air-to-ground co-operation on the Italian side, by the shortage of equipment and again poor logistics on the Greek side. It was a long campaign of attrition and attrition was playing in favour of the RA, with the EVA less and less relevant. The RAF was a significant player but not a decisive one and its bombing efforts against Albania and Italy are worth a mention, not least because the effort was made, even though it is hard to say how effective it was, if at all. The 1941 war against Yugoslavia saw the JKRV fighting with a better plan than the army, but the almost complete lack of infrastructure and co-ordination rendered a quick Luftwaffe victory unavoidable. Still, one has to note that a relatively large number of Yugoslav aircraft managed to avoid destruction and escape to Greece, and from there to Egypt which means that the Luftwaffe did not completely destroy the JKRV. The same cannot be said of the RAF and what remained of the EVA in April 1941, which was utterly defeated, also due to the lack of a combined defence plan and the swift advance of the German Army. Quite rightly, the VIII. Fliegerkorps considered the 1941 air campaign in the Balkans a complete success, even though there are some noticeable issues. First, the supply problem was barely solved. Secondly, the interdiction effort could not avoid the withdrawal of the Allied forces to the ports of embarkation. Thirdly, and most important of all, the anti-shipping campaign, albeit fruitful, failed to prevent the evacuation of the Allied forces from Greece. In summary, all the air forces involved had to deal with the same problems, from poor infrastructure to foul weather, down to the lack of a proper doctrine. The Germans managed better than the others thanks to their organization and style of command, but they too failed to achieve in full their goals.

Junkers Ju 87 Stuka flying over Athens, probably after the end of the campaign. Still valid in the ground support role, the Stuka units were amongst the first to be redeployed in the newly captured airfields as part of the ad hoc *Gefechtsverbände*, mixed combat formations. (Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe)

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Abbreviations and foreign language terms:
Aufklärungs (Reconnaissance)
BaT *Bombardamento a Tuffo* (Dive Bomber Unit)
BM *Bombardamento Marittimo* (Maritime Bomber)
BT *Bombardamento Terrestre* (Land Bomber)
C-in-C (Commander-in-Chief)
CM *Caccia Marittima* (Maritime Fighter)
Comando Aeronautica Albania (Albania Air Command)
Comando Superiore Truppe Albania (Army High Command in Albania)
CT *Caccia Terrestre* (Land Fighter)
EVA *Elliniki Vasiliki Aeroporia* (Royal Hellenic Air Force)
(F) *Fern* (long distance)
Fliegerführer (Air Commander)
(H) *Heer* (Army)
HQ (Headquarters)
JG *Jagdgeschwader* (Fighter Wing)
JKRV *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo* (Royal Yugoslav Air Force)
KEA *Kratikon Ergostasion Aeroplanon* (National Aircraft Factory)
KG *Kampfgeschwader* (Bomber Wing)
KG zbV *Kampfgeschwader zur besonderen Kommodore* (Commodore)
LG *Lehrgeschwader* (Training Wing)
Mira Dioxes (Fighter Squadron)
Mira Vomvardismou (Bomber Squadron)
OA *Osservazione Aerea* (Aerial Observation)
RA *Regia Aeronautica* (Royal Italian Air Force)
RAF (Royal Air Force)
Regio Esercito (Royal Italian Army)
Sezione Autonoma di Volo (Independent Flight Section)
Stab (Headquarters)
StG *Stukageschwader* (Dive-Bomber Wing)
Stratiotkis Synergassias (Army Co-operation Squadron)
Verwendung (Special Purpose)
ZAT *Zona Aerea Territoriale* (Territorial Air Zone)
ZG *Zerstörergeschwader* (Destroyer Wing)

Author's note
Greek and Yugoslav names use the Latin alphabet for simplicity. Ordinal numbers are used for Italian units and indicate their gender, thus: *1ª Squadriglia* (female), *1° Gruppo* (male), *1° Stormo* (male), etc.